

BANDWAGON

MARCH-APRIL 2009



BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Vol. 53. No. 2

FRED D. PFENING, JR.

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

MARCH-APRIL 2009

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Bandwagon, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968), is published bi-monthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc., 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691. Periodicals Postage Paid at Columbus, OH. Postmaster: Send address changes to Bandwagon, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691.

Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221. Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$100, half page \$60, quarter page \$35. Minimum ad \$25.

Bandwagon, new membership and subscription rate: \$40.00 per year in the United States; \$44.00 per year in Canada and outside United States. Single copies \$4.00 plus \$2 postage. Please direct all concerns regarding address changes and lack of delivery to the editor. Membership applications can be found on the CHS web site <http://circushistory.org>.

CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. <http://circushistory.org>. Robert F. Sabia President, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185; Judith Griffin, Vice President, 519 N. Union St., Appleton, WI 54911-5031; Robert Cline, Secretary 2707 Zoar Rd., Cheraw, SC 29520; Joe Parker, Treasurer, 6458 Ridgemont Drive, Dallas, TX 75214-1696.

Trustees: Alan Campbell, 600 Kings Peak Dr., Alpharetta, GA 30022-7844; Robert Cline, 2707 Zoar Rd., Cheraw, SC 29520; Judith Griffin, 519 N. Union St., Appleton, WI 54911-5031; Fred Dahlinger, Jr., 451 Roblee Rd., Baraboo, WI 53913; John McConnell, 1 Skyline Dr., Morristown, NJ 07960; Joe Parker, 6458 Ridgemont Drive, Dallas, TX 75214-1696; Fred D. Pfening, Jr., 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221; Fred D. Pfening III, 1075 W. Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212; John F. Polacsek, 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, MI 48236; Richard J. Reynolds III, 1186 Warrenhall Lane N.E., Atlanta, GA 30319; Robert F. Sabia, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185; Al Stencell, 15 Lark St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4L-3M5. Trustee Emeritus: Stuart L. Thayer.

THE FRONT COVER

Following the season closing of Garden Bros. Circus Ian Garden, Jr. joined the Circus Vidbel for a fall tour. He is pictured here with his liberty act inside the beautiful Vidbel big top. Jim Cole photo.

THE BACK COVER

This post card view of the Buffalo Bill Wild West was taken in Rome Italy in 1906. Pfening Archives.

NEW MEMBERS

Michael Naughton 4541
P. O. Box 440
Slingerlands, NY 12159

Steven Hyde 4542
891 Back St.
Montoursville, PA 17754

James Leiner 4543
710 Hewitt Lane
New Windsor, NY 12553

Mary Lou Hainer 4544
P. O. Box 3304
Palm Springs, CA 92263-3304

Joseph P. Dougherty 4545
P. O. Box 83
Whitehall, PA 18052-0083

Larry Saylor 4546
1165 Country Club Rd.
Greenville, IL 62246

CORRECTIONS

In the September-October *Bandwagon* two photos in the Rhett Coates article were not correctly identified. On page 10 the caption should have read Stock car No. 33. On page 15 the caption should have read four stock cars.

In the January-February issue the Campbell Bros. article should have credited Fred Dahlinger for providing information on the history and disposition

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES

1968-All but Jan.-Feb.
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1972-All available.
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1975-All available.
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.
1978-All available.
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.
1980-1986-All available.
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.
1988-2008-All available.

In addition to above many other issues are available going back to the 1960s. If you are in need of early issues write to the Editor.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$3.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES
2515 DORSET RD.
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

of many of the Campbell parade wagons.

CHS DUES NOTICES

CHS dues notices will be mailed soon. The Board of Directors voted to discontinue sending membership cards each year. If any member wishes to receive a membership card it can be requested from the Treasurer.

CIRCUS MEMORIES

Has For Sale

New and Out-of-print Books

Memorabilia, Programs

Original Photos, Routes

30 page list \$3.00

Send to Paul Horsman
7926 State St. Rd.
Port Byron, NY 13140

THE CIRCUS YEAR IN REVIEW

2008 SEASON



By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

The big events of the 2008 circus season were: The Feld organization purchasing a motor sports company; Guy Laliberte selling a twenty percent interest in Cirque du Soleil; Carson & Barnes announcing it would go to a single ring in 2009 and Paul Binder stating he would retire from the Big Apple Circus.

In April David Hammarstrom commented on his blog: "Do circuses face another 1938. Seventy years after arguably the worst season in American circus history, today's smaller shows are already foundering and it's only April. Cry, clown, cry. Seventy years later, at least two U. S. circuses that I know of (Cole and Vargas) do not offer the public program magazines. At least two (Cole and Kelly-Miller) have web sites that feature act photos from previous editions with no reference to current offerings. Virtually all U. S. tenters are ominously short handed, desperately awaiting temporary Mexican workers held back because of the Visa issue. All face the ugly realities of skyrocketing gas prices. What else? Despite a recessionary economy dumping more Americans into unemployment lines, our circuses can't seem to find U. S. citizens to move their tents. Why?

"But there are two major issues that do not bode well for 2008: bank-draining visits to the gas pump and a dearth of workers. What can the owners do to stave off the unthinkable? The one day standers can reduce their gas bills by playing fewer towns for longer stays. This favors those shows (like Cole and Vargas) with such a policy already in place, and it minimizes stress on overworked personnel—performers expected to help lug props and poles and ring curbs into place. In order to sustain a multiple day run, however, a show needs a certain showmanship that will generate

Carson & Barnes, the last large three ring big top in the country. Jim Cole photo.

word of mouth. I still believe that discount ducats for the moppets can only get you so far...

"On the other hand, the smaller shows have an advantage as the economy tanks: Highly affordable ticket prices and a public ready, I suspect, to gratefully embrace adequate entertainment for their children. . . .

"Whatever is next, I suggest less hula hoops and protracted pony ride intermissions; more dazzling artistry."

In contrast to the possible dire situation suggested above, all of the established tent shows finished the season and all planned to open again in 2009. Plus, a couple of new circuses opened in the fall.

Ben Trumble wrote about the problem of operating a tent show. "I wonder sometimes why so many traditional tent shows seem to actively avoid lengthy stays in major mar-

The Ringling-Barnum Red unit elephants. Jim Cole photo.





Daniel Raffo's tigers on Ringling Red. Jim Cole photo.

kets? Historically I imagine regulation played a part in that. Urban and suburban communities have more regulation, require more permits, have stricter inspection, etc. But these days almost every show is well versed in jumping through regulatory hoops anyway. Culturally for the shows based in the west once upon a town [time] the allure of small towns may have spoken to shared values, but again, small towns have grayed and changed. Marketing costs are probably the single biggest issue when it comes to playing more urban areas. While KM played very successfully in suburban Boston with traditional hosts, etc. — had the show played shopping centers for several days at a time, promoting that kind of date even with a nominal sponsor involves media buys, direct mailings, maybe ticket lay downs, significant expense. One interesting thing about the run up in fuel costs in recent years is that it takes some of the pain out of marketing buys. There's a certain appeal to two and three days stands with jumping, or even a week—and when the money that would otherwise go into fuel can offset media buys it might be said that while playing small communities has become dramatically more expensive, the expense for playing more urban areas for several days at a time has remained rather more static. Urban marketing in that sense has become less of a risk. To be accurate, some traditional tented shows like Cole have played highly urban centers all along, as did the Vargas show, espe-

cially in the days of Clifford Vargas. But the western shows, though comfortable now and then in a mall parking lot, have less practice in the cities. The success of Hispanic shows playing long stands in major cities should be a heads up to every traditional show. If circus goes where the crowds are, the crowds are in bigger towns building over longer stays."

The 138th edition of Ringling-Barnum's Blue unit opened on January 3 in Tampa with a show titled "Over the Top." A new innovation was the use of eight giant screens showing close-ups of the performers.

After seeing the show in New York Ernest Albrecht wrote in *Spectacle*: "Throughout the performance a state of the art lighting display (known in the trade as 'stealth screens') that runs along the long sides of the arena participates in the action with a variety of messages and visual enhancements, none more beautiful (if somewhat scene stealing) than those used during the flying act which look like watercolor paintings of a flying act. The lighting designer is Alex Reardon, and the overall production design is by Beowulf.

"The elephant display is made up of seven, mostly young, scene stealers. They are presented under the direction of Alex Petrov, and their number segues into a rainforest spec, with spectacular floral displays and a group of tree-like structures on which the girls, costumed in parrot-like gear, perch.

Tom Dougherty, lead clown on Ringling Red. Feld Entertainment photo,



"The feature of this part of the program is a double set of six swinging poles, like the solo troupe previously seen on the Big Apple. Doubled, they make an exciting visual effect as the poles criss-cross each other. They are ridden by Chinese acrobats, the Henan Troupe, who fly from pole to pole, achieving a series of gasp-provoking landings.

"The performance is topped off, and sent over the top finally by the explosion of several confetti cannons and the final bows of the entire company only seconds before we are totally exhausted from excitement created by the music, lights, the whirl of color and action."

The San Francisco *Chronicle* published this review of the Blue show: "If the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus has been off your radar for a while, you might find yourself wondering what happened to the self anointed 'Greatest Show on Earth.' The 138th edition, titled 'Over the Top,' opened Thursday at Oakland's Oracle Arena.



The Ringling Blue train in California. Jerry Cash photo.

"Three rings are one feature that's gone missing since my own last visit. While there are times when there's more than one thing to watch, much of the 2 1/2-hour production takes place in a single focus oval. That you may get used to and even appreciate at times. The show's hard-charging, Frisbee-snagging dogs and fleet horses, for example, benefit from the big open performing space and the audience's undivided attention.

"The glaring lack of imagination in the show's overall conception and pacing, by contrast, remains an unfilled hole. In an inane running feud, ringmaster Chuck Wagner and lead clown Tom Dougherty tussle over a red top hat and the attendant bragging rights of whose circus this really is.

"Children who are there for the elephants, the snow cones and Dougherty's fart jokes may not care, but the defining metaphor of 'Over the Top' is a labored political power struggle between the forces of sober authority (a ringmaster who disapproves of bubble blowing) and a toupee-topped clown who behaves like an overgrown and often tedious child. I was hoping a contortionist or some other dark-horse candidate might get into the race. Maybe a fresh plotline is hard to come by after 138 years, but this one is especially lame.

"The show's overall weirdness begins with a 'Star Spangled Banner' that's sung as a woman riding an elephant parades the flag around the arena. It extends to the long title number at the end of the first act, a sustained celebration of the internal combustion engine. As members of the audience travel the floor in super-sized big-wheel vehicles, a troupe of central European acrobats enters on what look like giant bouncing tires (could Firestone be behind this?). Then, in a roar of real fumes, one motorcycle charges up a slant wire while seven more prepare to roar around inside a steel mesh globe. It's a fossil fuel extravaganza.

"And then there's a bit with the trained porcupine and a balloon that gets too close . . . well, never mind.

"Just when you think the circus and your own inner child have permanently parted company, something comes along to remind you why clunky old school entertainments like this still have the power to delight. In one beguiling routine late in the show, the Henan Troupe of Chinese acrobats, dressed as sleek bright sea creatures with spines on their legs, take to a set of swinging poles. Their exuberant launches and midair landings look at once remarkable and joyfully effortless.



Vicenta Pages and her tigers on Ringling Gold. Jim Cole photo.

"That act comes in the midst of a Cirque du Soleil-ish production number that begins with a cleansing digital rainstorm on the show's over-used projection screens. A swarm of Day-Glo flowers and assorted dancing, springing and stilt walking life forms appear out of the darkness below. Maybe this should be construed as equal time for nature after all that gas guzzling in the first act.

"As for the tigers and elephants, both animal acts involve

a lot of lying down. The tigers roll over in sequence. The elephants play dead at various points. You're free to make up your own explanations for the horizontal theme. Or you could ask the animal rights demonstrators outside what they think about these collective shows of docility.

A semi-trailer on the Ringling Gold unit. Bill Rhodes photo.

"Once all earnest, cheerfully hyped razzmatazz, the circus has taken on a sheen of irony that seems all but mandatory in post-modern show business. It surfaces early on here, after an aerial act that's deployed on a set of giant key rings and several flowing drapes. Then, as ringmaster Wagner musically intones, it's time for 'The Queen of the Clouds' (Maria Garcia).

"The Queen arrives, steps out of her heels and proceeds to bumble through a series of awkward trapeze moves that leave her hanging askew with her costume half off and her royal hairpiece ruined. It's a reasonably well done feat of physical comedy. But it goes on far too long and not only comically subverts the 'real' aerialists but makes you more or less forget about them.

"I wondered what the young boy sitting near me was making of this. All but swallowed up inside his souvenir top hat, with a tub of popcorn in his lap, and twirly light toy in one hand, he seemed too occupied to be baffled. That's probably the best way to approach this woozy and uncertain edition of the circus. Find it where you can and with go with your own bliss."

The very successful 137th edition Red unit opened its second season in Miami, Florida January 5-15, traveling on 58 cars.

Kenneth Feld CEO of Feld Motor Sports. Feld Entertainment photo.



The Ringling Gold unit opened in Lakeland, Florida, January 11-14. It was titled "Boom a Ring."

The acts included Justin Case, bicycle comedy act; Vicenta Pages, white tigers; Patty Zerbin, elephants; Yulia



Negrey's tumbling group; Scolas, high wire act; Lina Aunola, cloud swing; Martti Peltonen, cross-bow; Valentin Dinov and Borislava Vaneva, perch pole.

Early in January Feld Entertainment, Inc. named Nicole and Alana Feld Executive Vice Presidents of the company. In the new positions, Nicole and Alana were charged with developing, growing and marketing Feld Entertainment's live family productions to the next generation of consumers.

Feld Entertainment announced the appointment of Dan Donoway as the new Vice President of marketing for Ringling-Barnum. Donoway had been with the Feld organization in various positions for ten years.

On September 11 the *Washington Business Journal* reported: "Feld Entertainment Inc. has bought Live Nation Inc. motor sports division for \$175 million, with up to \$30 million in future compensation. Live Nation's motor sports division hosts around 600 performances a year through its International Hot Rod Association, Monster Jam series, Freestyle Motorcross, and other racing and monster-truck shows."

The name of the company was changed to Feld Entertainment Motor Sports.

The Aurora, Illinois *News Blaze* noted: "Feld Entertainment Motor Sports will continue operations in Aurora, and will maintain its current management, tour schedules, promotional partnerships and performance structure.

"Today marks the single biggest expansion of Feld Entertainment in over forty years," said Kenneth Feld, Chairman and CEO of Feld Entertainment. With the addition of Motor Sports, Feld Entertainment can now offer families an even wider range of live family entertainment options. "We plan to take Monster Jam and all the Motor Sports spectacles to more domestic and international markets than ever before."

In November PETA warned the Ringling show to stop leasing tigers from a man under investigation for mistreating elephants. PETA sent a letter to Nicole Feld urging the show to stop leasing animals

from trainer Lance Ramos, also known as Lancelot Kollmann.

On November 18 Ringling-Barnum announced the birth of a female Asian elephant named Sundara. She was the twenty-first birth in the show's breeding program.

During the year there were rumors that the Ringling Gold unit would go overseas in 2009 after a poster turned up on the Internet in Italian.

In 2008 Cirque du Soleil had six touring shows, Alegria, Kiiza, Corteo, Dralion, Quidam and Varekai. On January 3 Saltimbanco opened in Quebec; on January 17 Quidam opened in Monterrey, Mexico on January 20; Corteo celebrated its 1,000 performance on January 25 in San Diego; Dralion opened in Tokyo, Japan; on February 29 Varekai opened in Amsterdam.

Cirque du Soleil's Guy Laliberte and Yoko Ono at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas.

Soleil opened a new show at the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas on September 12. The ticket prices were between \$150 and \$59. This was completely different production that featured Criss Angel's magic show. Angel produced the show independent of Soleil. The show was not well received by the critics.

David Hammarstrom wrote about the Angel show: "Can master illusionist Guy Laliberte turn a turkey into a long-running turkey? Among seven or eight recent consumer reviews on BroadwayBox.Com for Cirque du Soleil's new Vegas show, Believe, all of them in negative territory, here is one from East Dakota, titled 'Terrible.'

"A group of us in town from Boston saw the Criss Angel show last night. I had a free ticket and I still felt ripped off. It is sad to watch Cirque, which I generally have enjoyed over the years, put their name on something so awful. There hasn't been a great Cirque show in Vegas since 'O' and that was 10 years ago. The Criss Angel show sets a new low.

"Unlike 'Le Reve' or 'Ka' or some of the other Cirque-like shows that started bad but they have tinkered with and made fairly good, the Criss Angel show seems unlikely to be fixable because the concept itself is so flawed. Magic is about taking the ordinary and, when it is touched by this one special figure, it becomes unusual. That's why magicians come off as these ego-driven, pseudo cult figures—for which Criss Angel could be the archetype.

"Cirque, on the other hand, is about transporting you to a place and a group of people who are otherworldly from the get go. Things appear and disappear out of nowhere. The stage is nothing but trap doors. But the extraordinary thing is that even though this place is so strange, you know that the two guys on stage balancing on a broomstick are, in fact, human beings just like you. Knowing that somehow these performers have trained and trained and trained to get to the point that they can make the impossible look effortless is why Cirque is magical.

"On the other hand, back in the supposed 'magic' show,

the audience won't be impressed when someone disappears from under a sheet if they know the stage is riddled with trap doors. And you can't do a cliché saw-the-man-in-half trick as the show's climax after you've shown the audience earlier that you have the puppeteering technology to not only make supposedly sawed-off legs writhe around on a table but, back in the first act, dance about on stage.

"The anonymous, masked performer who turns out to have some physical skill that is beyond belief is the hallmark of the best Cirque shows. That is the opposite of what a magician is. It's not surprising, then, that the traditional

Cirque athleticism is almost entirely missing from the Criss Angel show. I'm sure that Mr. Angel was concerned such demonstrations of real talent would up stage him.

"The show had either extremely eager, sycophantic fans or, more likely, plants who were just hanging out in the bathroom striking up conversations about how great it was with anyone who would listen. I'm guessing plants since 3 friends went to the bathroom over a 20 minute period and ran into the same woman. It wreaks of desperation. If anyone tells you the show is good, ask them how much of a kick-back

they're getting from MGM/Mirage. I give the show 2 months. Tops.

"If you're a fan of magic and want to see a good show, check out 'Penn & Teller' at the Rio or even Lance Burton or David Copperfield when he's in town. If you'd like to see something Cirque-like, go see 'O' or 'Mystere' or 'Le Reve.'"

Soleil opened "Zed" in Tokyo on October 1. Many of the acts were in the air. "Zaia," Soleil's first venture into China, opened on May 29.

In September 20% of Cirque du Soleil was sold to the investment arm of Dubia. The agreement kept control of show with founder Guy Laliberte. Cirque agreed to build a theater in Dubai.

Paul Binder. David Hammarstrom collection.





The first Big Apple Circus in 1977. Big Apple Circus photo.

In 2008 Soleil reported 10.5 million tickets sold and revenue nearing the \$1 billion mark. On December 2 it unveiled a long term plan to invade Russia. The establishment of a brand there could include both big top and arena touring units.

The Big Apple Circus opened its summer tour in Atlanta, February 8-23. It then played Bridgewater, New Jersey; Boston; Queens, New York; Long Island, New York; West Nyack, New York; Charlestown, Rhode Island and Hanover, New Hampshire. The 30th anniversary show was titled Celebrate.

The acts included Barry Lubin as Grandma; the Huesca Brothers, risley; Carrie Harvey; Yelena Larkina, hula hoops; Fumagalli and Davis; Kovgar Troupe, teeterboard and risley; Rob Slowik; Kris Kremore, juggler; Yasmine Smart, liberty horses; Virgile Peyramaure, Regina Dobrovitskaya, aerial act; Irina Markova, dogs; Andrey Mantchev and Sarah Schwartz, balancing and Cong Tian, unicycle juggling on wire.

The mixed animal act on UniverSoul Circus. UniverSoul photo.



On October 22 Paul Binder, founder of the Big Apple Circus, announced that he would retire as artistic director and ringmaster following the opening of the new show, entitled Play On, in Damrosch Park at Lincoln Center. He will focus on fund raising and travel the world searching for new circus acts. Binder was succeeded by Guillaume Dufresnoy, Big Apple's general manager.

Binder and co-founder Michael Christensen first produced the show in 1977 in a green 1,000-seat tent on a landfill that became Battery Park City. Binder and Christensen began as street jugglers in the mid-1970s. The show appeared in 10 cities and had a \$21 million budget.

The UniverSoul Circus opened in Savannah, Georgia, February 1-3. The new show was titled Jabulani, a celebration of joy, happiness and laughter. The show played Detroit, September 3-14. Andrew McClain was ringmaster with his sidekick Zeke and presented a mixed exotic act with camels, llamas, ponies and a zebra. Other acts included Cossack riders; China Soul, acrobats; Brazil brothers, cradle act; El Niche, tigers; Twisted Soul, contortionists; Ebon, silk act and George Hanneford's three elephants.

Cole Bros. Circus opened in Deland, Florida, April 1-2. The acts included Mike Rice, comedy horse and rider, camels at liberty, dog act; Preciado Family, flying act; Monica, single trapeze; Osorio Troupe, teeterboard act; motorcycle globe; Frank Murray's two elephants and Kellan Bermudez, cannon.

Ernest Albrecht commented on the Cole show in *Spectacle*: "What a delightful surprise it is to find something one has never seen before, which in this case happened to me in the new Cole Bros. Circus.

"Take for instance the hair hanging act, presented by Petya Milanova and Viktoria Medeiros. We've seen it many times before, and its vocabulary of tricks is rather limited. The two young ladies who perform it on Cole have added something new, a hair to hair hang. The two women, one of whom hangs upside down, are attached by their hair. Unfortunately sometime after I saw the show in June one of the women left the show and the act can no longer be seen.

"Then there is the passing leap of the flying return act. The two flyers leave the fly bar in piggy back style. The one being carried completes the pass on the first return. I've asked Hovey Burgess about this one, and while it is new to me, he says he has seen it before. The hair-to-hair hang he confirms is completely novel.

"Despite the novelty, the amount of time spent between tricks, a complaint I have with most traditional flying acts, here seems particularly egregious.

"Another novelty is presented by the three riders in the Globe of Death, which pulls apart at its horizontal diameter, leaving a wide gap in the middle which the riders must avoid. Quite an impressive piece of apparatus and a well executed thrill.

"Two other acts were standouts, the first being the liberty camels presented by Mike Rice. While their maneuvers were fascinating, particularly if one studies the personality of these beasts, Rice was grim faced throughout. A little showmanship goes a long way. The other stellar attraction was a solo trap, presented by Miss Monica from Budapest. Her performance was replete with all the twists and spins a la current fashion in trap acts. A spin around



Cole Bros. Circus in Dalton, Massachusetts. Bob Sugarman photo.

the bar and a full pirouette before catch were particularly impressive."

On May 30 the Framingham, Massachusetts Board of Health forced about thirty Cole workers to abandon their sleeping quarters, saying the trailers were unsanitary and unsafe. Cole agreed to pay \$9,000 to repair damaged turf after playing Abington, Massachusetts on June 23-24 after leaving deep tracks on a football field. The show began a three day stand in Lindenhurst, Long Island on July 4. By then Tim Frisco's elephants had joined the show.

Geary and Barbara Byrd trimmed the size their Carson & Barnes Circus as a result of the increased cost of moving the show. When it opened on March 26 it moved on fewer trucks than in the past. There were 15 semi-trailers; 3 straight trucks with trailers; 8 travel trailers and 5 small trucks with trailers.

Raou Pintado was performance director. The acts included the Ferandes family, flying act and space wheel; Sergey Dotenko, dogs; Ferrari Sisters, silks; Uzbek Trio, hand balancing; and Hernandez Family, high wire.

Making a coast to coast tour, the show played San Francisco, September 12-14, appearing on the parking lot of the venerable Cow Palace. The show was reviewed there by David Hammarstrom on his Showbiz David blog: "San Francisco, September 12, 2008 - 4:30 p.m. Seats: \$27.00 top. Rides: \$6.00 top (elephant).

"The wonder of Carson & Barnes Circus is that at its best, it is as good as Ringling once was. If only its best could last beyond the first four or five compelling displays. After that, sadly, a very promising show slides downward into a paceless hodgepodge—weaker and fewer acts, disruptive concession activities and woefully amateurish clowning.

"A thrilling non-stop stream of early action (worth 3-1/2 stars) had the audience oohing and ahing with shared

delight—from the festive opening splash 'Be A Clown!' through three-ring displays of charming dogs and ponies, inventive contortionists and aerialists, and even a hula hoop exhibition of arresting variety and climactic punch that had me on its side. Without a program magazine for sale, these talented performers will remain nameless. Nor are the shrill announcements of an overbearing ringmaster through a muddled sound system of much help.

"Trouble enters the tent with the old Peterson Peanut pitch, which looked nothing short of desperate. What price a few bucks of extra revenue? And when the carnival came to town at

intermission time, ironically, the pony and elephant rides and the painted clown faces for sale would be the last time when all three rings were simultaneously in motion.

"To be fair, Carson and Barnes had more than those first five or six displays to offer the public: a nicely staged aerial ballet; a winning Wheel of Destiny routine; and a lovable trio of nimble footed pachyderms working the center ring in a sprightly fashion. Four stars to these show-stealing pros! There is also a colorful patriotic spec that likely plays better in red states. It only lacks a stronger payoff. Costumes here and elsewhere are usually excellent (C&B have raised their own standards), as is the lighting. Taped music is generally



Carson & Barnes Circus setting up in the Cow Palace parking lot. David Hammerstrom photo.

appropriate."

While the show was in Davenport, Iowa on July 10 office-man Mauricio Droguet was stabbed and killed by his ex-wife Debi Joy Droguett Olson.

Circus Vargas opened in San Diego, January 31. John Weiss was new to the show. Acts were Miss Mariela, horseback ballet; the Espana Duo, rolla-bolla; Matty Jordan and Dorian, extreme jugglers; Les Arata, Spanish web; Skyriders, globe act and the Torreblanca clowns.

Showbiz David had this to say about the Vargas performance in San Francisco on August 13: "Watching Circus Vargas is like sitting down at a fine French restaurant, the



Entrance to Circus Vargas. Jerry Cash photo.

first entree magnificent, only to be interrupted every 5 or 10 minutes by one distraction after another a man off the street with a pet alligator offering to let you touch it and to have your photo taken with it between the main course and desert; another fellow running up to your table, shouting 'Are you enjoying your meal?' And still another wanting to pull you into the kitchen and teach you how to be a star chef. After this going on half the night, you leave exhausted and irked, fighting to remember why you ever went there in the first place.

"Oh, yes, to see a circus. Actually, there is enough fine talent with this year's edition of Circus Vargas, if only somebody—a director, a truant officer, a screaming Richard Barstow back from the dead—would grab the throat of this overstuffed mess and shake it down to length. Like down to a tautly restrained one hour thirty minutes. Out would go audience participation filler, clown routines needing the scissors, and desperate verbal interactions with the audience designed to force applause and fake displays of customer satisfaction.

"Circus 1A: It's a pity and a crime, because on many levels, Vargas excels, from an exemplary front door staff (the classiest I've encountered in years) to a string of stellar artists who deserve a far more focused and professional showcase.

"The strong turns: The opening sequence—no circus I can recall in recent years has opened with such heart-pounding force. A captivating original song, 'Circus Vargas,' sung with power by Ted McRae underscores the ensemble performing a variety of routines. Class A all the way."

Hammarstrom used bullet points to catalog the positive aspects of the performance: "Engaging and diversified juggling from Esquedas. Great showmanly act. An amply amusing (no shills involved) safari spoof from two clowns out of the Torreblanca Family—in the mode of Lou

Jacobs with shooting tears, but they advance the routine with additional touches, including a head of hair that raises high and the emission of white powder from—oh no, how do I put this?—from an area of the human body known to cause unpleasant odors. Overall, an absolute delight. This is clowning we need more of. Memorable trampoline exploits from the Martinellis. A clean classy flying routine, with a solid triple, from the Tabares. They have the flash and the flair, and I only wish they would have stayed up there longer. Rolly Bolly from the Espana Duo.

Although this is not a gracefully enacted turn, the payoff trick is so amazingly good, I wanted to stand up and shout 'Bravo!' Franciso Mendoza's mock bullfight. Am I glad they brought him back, for he totally turned my attitude around. Last year, I was left wanting. This time the entire act proved to be one of two comedy highlights of the evening, the other being heretofore mentioned. Other notable moments: An ambitious female duo working the lyra, with their end items worthy of respect. And there are some winning tricks that just need editing down. For example, during a slow-moving equestrian pas de deux, a shill apprentice dragged from the crowd, dangling off the horse by a mechanic, grabs hold of John Weiss and they become a graceless duo in motion. Very, very funny! Weiss, in fact, could have been given sole master of ceremonies and announcing chores. A shrewd director might have woven his mischief into other acts, but with BREVITY.

"This show seems to have been produced under a couple of dubious assumptions: One, the longer the performance takes, the more the audience will respect it. Two, audiences need to be talked to a lot, which made me wonder if this show was directed by a group therapist. Actually, the talking begins with an engaging 20-minute 'Interactive pre-show party' for the moppets hosted by tv personality John Weiss. All good and well except this party begins when the

Circus Vargas lot in San Pedro, California November 14. Jerry Cash photo.



show should, so we the adults are held captive. After that, Weiss then becomes one of three announcing figures. Another is ringmaster Ted McRae, who gets to show off his cobra snake and offer photo ops to the audience during an obscenely protracted intermission. Throughout the show, he repeatedly works the crowd for applause and shout backs. 'Are you having fun, San Francisco! Are you enjoying the show? I can't hear the other side of the tent!' So annoying, it felt like being part of a studio audience before the taping of a television show when a guy comes out to pump you up.

"And I wanted to shout back, 'Shut up, will you!' Polack Bros Circus co-founder Louis Stern, who lasted forty years in the business, once told his last ringmaster Robert Mitchell, who had been asking the audience before each intermission, 'Are you enjoying the show?' to knock it off. Said Stern sternly, 'One time they booed us.'

"Lighting and costumes are generally excellent. The taped music, I must admit, is quite effective for much of the time, relevantly scored to the action at hand, though it does start to wear thin as the evening wears on and out. Following two motorcyclists from the Willy Family circling each other in the big cage, finale comes on with smiling faces. The audience (a very small crowd, maybe a quarter house) seemed moved. Then out go the performers through the front door to congregate around, there to interact with the exiting crowd. Nice touch, I suppose. I have only ever seen this done once before, at a community theatre.

"The tent itself remains a work of art, mysterious and enchanting and so inviting. It deserves a superior performance that already exists in the ingredients. Another asset would be at least the handout of a one-sheet program.

"Circus Vargas: Go to the back of the tent and repeat a thousand times over: 'Every action, every moment, every pause and every word spoken either propels or retards the action.' Were your strongest offerings to be placed back to back, and were all the irritating forced audience interactions and pitches routed, what a show you might have. Might that be, per chance, what you really want?"

Casey Cainan and John North in the tiger cage. Kelly-Miller photo.

John Ringling North II opened his Kelly-Miller Circus in Hugo, Oklahoma on March 15. The performance included Brent Michaels, juggler; Natlie Canan, dogs; Rosales family, perch poles act, hula-hoops and wheel of death; Friedman Torales, rolla bolla and up-side-down



aerial loops; Armando Loyal, comedy horse act and elephants; Black Ninjas, tumblers; Sara Green, single trap; and Casey Canan, tiger act. After playing sixteen states and traveling 10,032 miles the show closed in Abilene, Texas on November 10.

Johnny Walker's Walker Bros. Circus again played a winter indoor route. It was in Rochester, New Hampshire on April 22. The acts included Rebecca Ostroff, single trapeze and Jennifer Walker, pony review.

The tented show played Biddeford, Maine, June 26-29, and Whitneyville, Maine on July 3. Dallas Rosaire Zoppe was ringmaster. The acts included Paolo Carballo, juggler; Becky Ostroff, single trapeze and chifton; clown Lucho Car-



Opening day of Culpepper & Merriweather on March 2. Harry L. Kingston photo.

ballo; Carlos Svenson, goat act and comedy riding; Miss Virginia, hand balancing; Sashi Meluzzi, dressage horse; and Duo Fusion, adagio dancing.

Trey Key's Culpepper and Merriweather Circus opened March 2 in Trinity, Texas. New to the show was a large generator coming from Circus Chimera. The acts were: Trey Keys with a lion and two young tigers; Simon Dykes, single trapeze; Pauline Dykes, bird act; April Dykes, rola bola; Robin Ann Dykes, Spanish web; Dykes family, unicycles; Dykes and Shane Johnson, trampoline; Ron Dykes, juggler; Doug Terranova's elephants presented by Louie Del Morale and Shane Johnson, comedy car. Later in April the cat act and the elephants were sent home due to a labor shortage in setting up the show.

John "Gopher" Davenport opened the season in Jasper, Texas with a small indoor unit titled The Big Top Circus. The under-canvas show, still using the Big Top title, played Belleville, Nebraska on May 27. By June the show was in Montana. Davenport's show continued west through Idaho.

A spokesperson for the Spokane, Washington Better Business Bureau provided information about Davenport's activities in Oregon and Washington. By July his Circus Latino, sometimes called Circus Latina Americas or The Kingford Circus of Las Vegas, showed up in Oregon. Then it moved into eastern Washington, booked for Colville, July 17. Here the show tangled with the Better Business Bureau. The Colville Chamber of Commerce issued a warning that it had complaints about questionable dealings with a traveling circus trying to set up at the last minute at a county fairgrounds. The group using the Latino names used a drop box in Las Vegas. The agent's name

was Carol King and/or Judy K.

The BBB discovered that after the show was turned away at the Northeast fairgrounds, its agent had called at the last minute wanting to arrange dates, saying that they had a circus they wanted to bring to town. The fairgrounds stated it had sent the agent a contract, requiring proof of insurance, as well as payment in full before they would sign a contract with anyone. The agent stated that, "The guys can bring all of that when they come."

The show asked for time and eventually came back with copy of a "proof of insurance form." However, the fairgrounds did not accept it, saying that the information was questionable. They

asked for the show to produce the "original" insurance proof. The fairgrounds also asked the show to pay the required fee of \$470. The show did not produce the original document, but did pay the rental fee using two checks signed by a "Mr. Bailey," drawn on a Bank of America account. When the fairgrounds looked into the validity of the checks they were advised by the bank that the account had been closed. The fairgrounds advised the local police in case their help might be needed. The Washington State Highway Patrol was also notified as some of the show vehicles plates had expired.

The show finally left the fairgrounds and headed to Othello, Washington wanting to do business with the fairgrounds there. The Othello officials chose not to do business with them.

The show was registered as Kingford LLC with the Nevada Secretary of State.

On July 30 the *Blue Mountain Eagle* of John Day, Oregon published an article, which read in part: "The Grant County Fairgrounds has cancelled a circus that was headed to town, just two weeks after the Better Business Bureau in Washington state raised an alarm about dealings with a traveling circus troop there."

"The circus, dubbed either Circus Latino or Circus Latino Americas, had sought to perform on Thursday July 31, on the track in front of the grandstands.

"However, fairgrounds manager Stephaine Walters said last week that too many questions had been raised about the Circus' dealings in other communities to allow the show to go on. In addition, poorly produced fliers and tickets, which had numerous typographic or spelling errors, raised red flags, she said.

"The final straw was when I noticed on the tickets that they are coming on Wednesday July 31," Walters said. 'July

31 is Thursday.'

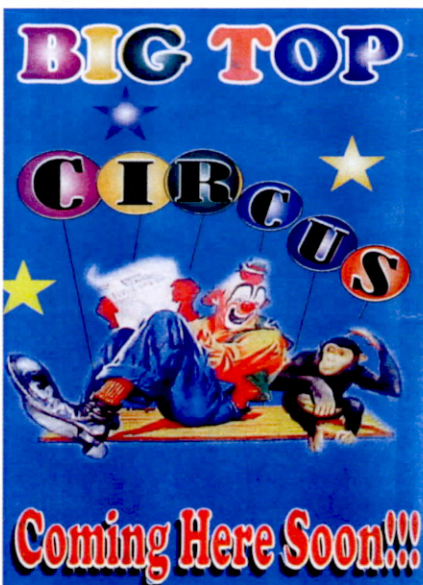
"The BBB said the circus had told the fairgrounds that the Kingford or Kingford Circus was coming, but by week's end the circus was described as Circo Latino or on the (kid's) tickets-Circus Latina Americas."

"Contacted by the *Blue Mountain Eagle*, the circus representative identified as 'Judy' said Circo Latino and the Kingford Circus are not connected—even though they have the same address and contract information.

"Asked what went wrong in Washington state, she said she wasn't sure but that it was a 'huge mess.'

"Posters for the circus began appearing in windows in John Day more than a week ago. Tickets were listed at \$10, although the promoters said coupons for discount and kid's admission would be available at local merchants."

Poster used by Gopher Davenport. Ron Sanford collection.



Bob Childress' Lewis and Clark Circus opened its spring tour on March 19 in Westminster, South Carolina. It moved on one truck and trailer carrying the big top, seating, poles, canvas, ring curb and donniker. There was also a working men's bunkhouse, a livestock trailer and a tiger trailer. A moon bounce, camel rides, petting zoo and snake show were on the midway.

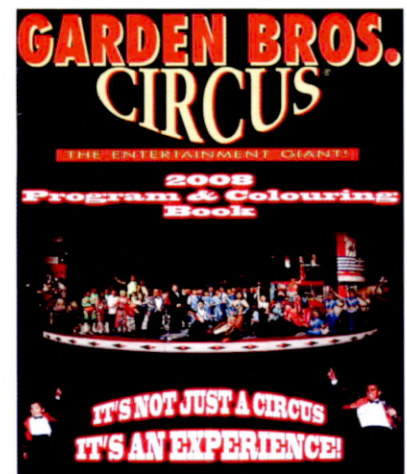
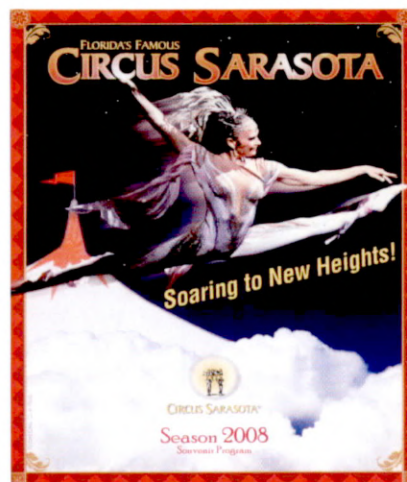
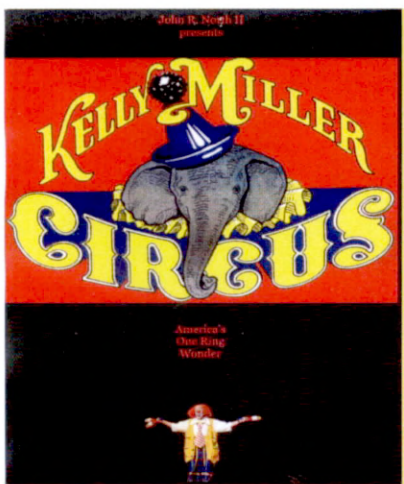
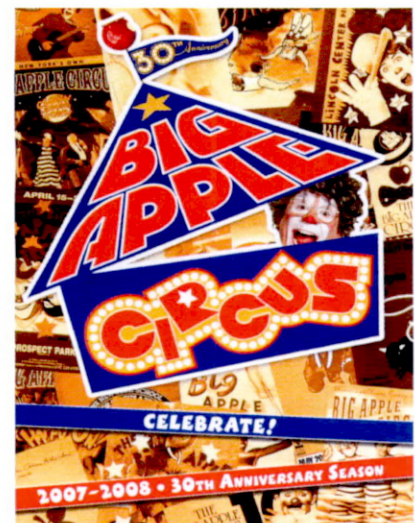
The show sported a new red and yellow 70 by 100-foot big top. Brian LaPalme returned as ringmaster and performed magic. New to the performance was Jose Ayala, Jr. with a silk act and rola bola. Other acts were Farmer Brown, goats; Elizabeth Ayala, lyre; Maria Ayala, camels; and Armando Ayala, juggling.

On April 24 the show was in Lancaster, South Carolina. By early July Barry DeChant, had replaced LaPalme, who left to fulfill other commitments. Bob Childress was working the three tiger act on the midway after each performance.

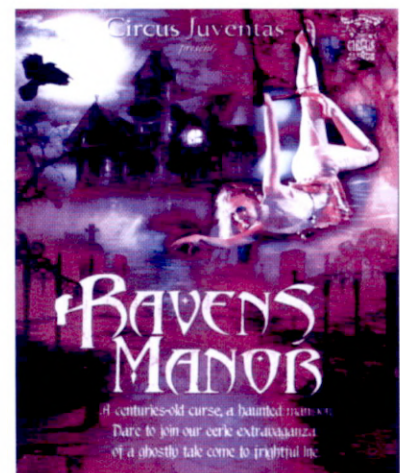
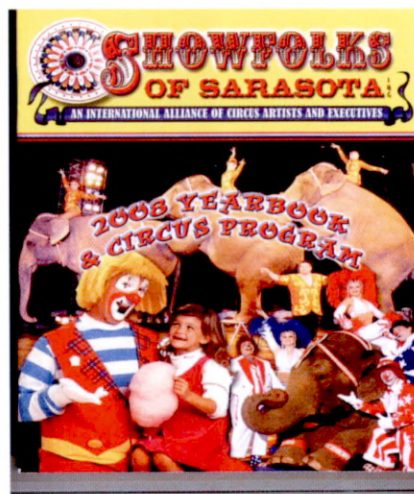


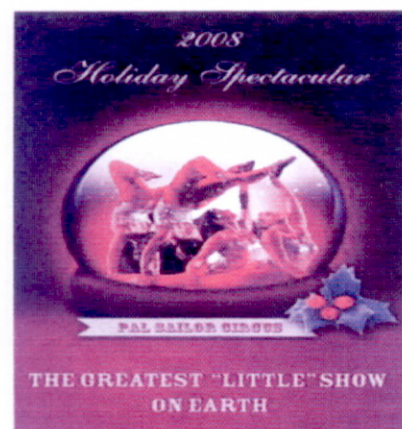
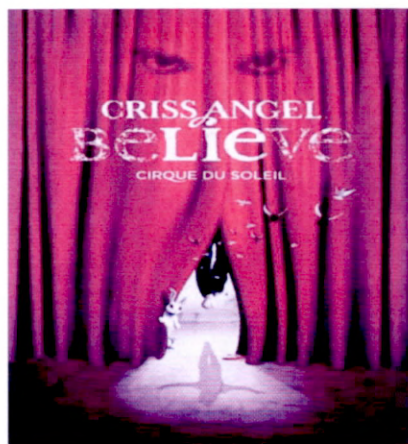
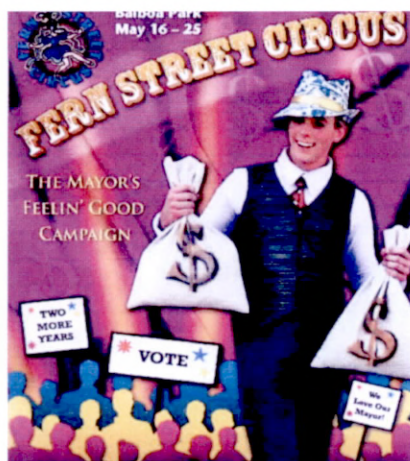
The Lewis & Clark Circus in Leesville, Louisiana, October 25. Harry L. Kingston photo.

The Alain Zerbini Family Circus performed for the Circus Fans Association convention in Sarasota on April 17, under their large European big top. Melody Christian was ringmaster. The acts included the Brazilian All Stars, trampoline; Chayne Rosales, rope jumping; Alain Zerbini, dogs; Delilah and Lesly, hand balancing; Ozzie Sanchez, drums; Julian Zerbini, camels; Rosales family, juggling; Lesly Rosales,



2008 PROGRAMS





The Alain Zerbini Circus in Fair Lawn, New Jersey in September. Paul Gutheil photo.

Spanish web and Gustavo Christian, space wheel.

The Anastasini Family Circus played the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia, August 7-17 and the Michigan State Fair in Detroit, August 21 to September 1. Cirque Berzerk played Los Angeles, July 24-27. The show was titled Beneath. Appearing under a small two-pole big top the acts included Chantel Durelli, single trapeze; Susanne Bernel, aerial silks; and Hayley Kent, contortion.



Circus Berzerk in Los Angeles. Jerry Cash photo.

Circus Pages opened in Arcadia, Florida early in January. It played Melvindale, Michigan, July 14. The performance included James Earhart, dog act; Colleen Pages, tigers, aerial lyre and; mixed camel and pony act; a web act; Ibarra brothers, trampoline; Miss Jessica, silk act, and white tigers and a lion; Frieda Pages, silk act; clown Mike Gearhart; and George Pages, one horse liberty act and two African elephants.

Garden Bros. Circus ventured south of the border to play Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, April 3. It was in Lowell, Massachusetts on April 8. The performance included: John Kennedy Kane, clown; Ian Garden, Jr. with eight liberty horses; the Lopez Troupe, high wire; the Shen Yang acrobats; Zeman Karoly, BMX bike act and platform roller skating; the Magical Karima, quick change act; Ciara and Kiana Garden, hula hoops; the Dominique motor cycle globe; the Beijing Long Ho tumblers; Magical Karimas, quick change; and three Carson & Barnes elephants. Garden played Poughkeepsie, New York later in April.

Circus Sarasota opened February 1, appearing in its home town under its own big top. The show later played Estero, Florida, March 11-30. This date used some different acts from the Sarasota engagement. The acts in Estero included clowns Dick and Tiffany Monday; Yermenko, four-man acrobatic team; Andrey Markov, dogs; Ricardo Sosa, hand balancing; the Poema family, hand balancing; Daniel Hochsteiner, tennis rackets; the Cristiani family, trampoline and Joseph Dominic Bauer, space wheel.



The Zoppe Family Circus on a lot. Zoppe photo.

The Zoppe Family Circus played the Italian Festival in Canton, Ohio, June 28. Alberto Zoppe introduced the performance. The acts included Adrian Poema, Jr., juggler; Poema Family, risley; Rudolph Heinen, dogs; Kim Brothers, juggling on horse back; Amy Ricco, cloud swing; and clown Giovanni Zoppe. It was at the Altamont, New York fair, August 12.

Circus Flora played St. Louis, June 5-22 and Nantucket, Massachusetts, July 25-27. The performance included the Wallendas, high wire; the Poema risley act; the Flying

Cortes flying act, and Lisa Dufresne, solo dressage and miniature liberty horses; Duo Madrona, aerial act; clown Giovanni Zoppe and Svenson's goats.

Inside the Circus Flora big top. Flora photo.

Daniel Durchholz reviewed Flora for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on June 8. "Those familiar with the legend of Robin Hood and his band of merry men might not recall the tale featuring jugglers, trained goats and a trapeze act. But with most stories, the quality is in the telling, and Circus Flora's production of 'Sherwood Forest' is better for its broad interpretation. "The St. Louis-based one ring circus, which runs through June 22 under its own tent on the Powell Hall parking lot, uses the classic tale as a framework to introduce its performers, from the Flying Wallendas—a world famous high wire act—to the St. Louis Archers—a troupe of promising young local artists who perform acrobatics, bareback riding and other feats of skill and daring.

"The show is family entertainment in every sense. Not only is it a production for all ages to enjoy, but many of its performers are families themselves—such as the Flying Cortes trapeze act, which features brothers Robinson and Alex Cortes and Robinson's wife Alida Wallenda. Another is the Poemas, led by the father, Adrian Poema, who foot juggles his children, Catherine, Mariana and Adrian Jr.

"Circus Flora is named after Flora the elephant, who formerly performed but is now retired. The show still features animal acts. This edition includes a group of large horses used for bareback riding stunts as well as miniature horses trained by Lisa Dufresne. There is also a herd of goats that perform a humorous turn led by trainer Carlos Svenson.

"It is impossible not to feel a part of the action at Circus Flora. No seat under the tent is very far from the ring, and those closest to the action often have crew members buzzing around them, setting up the next act while another one is on.

"It's also likely that a member of the audience will suddenly find himself or herself a part of the circus, as a man in a black Route 66 T-shirt did on Friday. Selected to assist with a display of marksmanship by clown Giovanni Zoppe, the man was blindfolded and had a balloon shot out from between his legs with a bow and arrow. Or at least he thinks he did, unless his family told him what really happened.

"Overall, the show is a delight, and brings the tale of Robin Hood to life in a most unlikely way.

"Oh, and how were the goats? Not baaaaad, of course."

Struppi Hanneford operated multiple units simultaneously, using four big tops. The Royal Hanneford Circus played the Allentown, Pennsylvania Jaffe Shrine, April 14-20. Billy



Martin was ringmaster. The performance included Clayton Rosaire's cat act; Angela Martin, single trapeze; Craig Rogers, dogs; Jim Hall's bears; clown Grandma; Leo Garcia, space wheel; Vugantuya, contortionist; and three Carson & Barnes elephants.

Hanneford produced the Dayton, Ohio Shrine, April 25-27. Billy Martin was ringmaster. The acts included Clayton Rosaire, tigers; Angela Martin, single trap; Miss Dulce, hair hang; Clayton Rogers, dogs; Benito Aguilar, juggling; Smirnov Duo, quick change; Zoppe riders; Cortes flying act; and Carson & Barnes elephants.

A Hanneford unit played Adventureland amusement park near Altoona, Pennsylvania from late May to late July. Billy Martin was ringmaster. The performance included Angela Martin, single trapeze; Benito Aguilar, juggler and Yago Garcia, cannon act. Struppi Hanneford produced the Big E Super Circus under the big Canobbio big top. The performance featured Sylvia Zerbini, the Flying Pages and the Carson & Barnes elephants presented by Joe Frisco. Among the visitors there were members of the Circus Historical Society, which had its convention in conjunction with the show and the fair.



The Royal Hanneford Circus in White Plains, New York. Paul Gutheil photo.

Tarzan Zerbini played the Detroit Shrine, April 10-13. When the Zerbini show was playing the Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Shrine, reporter Ned Powers, of the local *Star Phoenix* wrote on May 14 about Zerbini: "He was back in the cage only 48 hours after being mauled by an 800-pound lion in a performance in Cleveland in 1967. He kept his traveling circus afloat in 1982 after nearly falling into bankruptcy. And today, he's still on the road for almost 10 months of the year in spite of the rapidly escalating price of diesel fuel.

"I was born and raised in a circus family. I've never known anything else but the everyday excitement. Even

when we spend our time in winter camp, it only takes two or three days and I want to be out on the road again,' says Tarzan Zerbini, who brings his troupe to Saskatoon Prairieland Park for the annual Shrine Circus Friday to Sunday.

"Zerbini was a teenager when he came from Italy to North America with his family's circus company [to join the Mills Bros. Circus].

"In North America, they wanted me to be a lion trainer, like some of the others, who used the gun, whip and chair. I did commands with the voice. The accident in Cleveland was scary. I broke an arm and took a couple of hundred stitches. But after a day off for travel, I was back in the cage in Milwaukee."

"You know what they say: The show must go on. But after each show for a while, I would go to a hospital to take antibiotic treatment."

"Zerbini was working with the tigers the first time he came to Saskatoon as part of Hubert Castle's company.

"Castle sold him the circus for the 1980 season.

"I hired new acts, we dressed up the atmosphere, but the returns at the gate didn't add up to what I was told they might be. We went \$1.5 million into debt but with help, we were soon back on our feet."



The Zerbini big top in Canada.

"One of the secrets for Zerbini's long-standing run has been his association with Shriners.

"His circus plays about 400 shows a year in 70 to 80 North American cities and many are sponsored by the Shriners. This year's Saskatchewan sponsorship of the circus is the 55th for the Shriners. There are stops in The Battlefords, Yorkton, Regina, Esevan, Swift Current and Moose Jaw as well.

"The costs of travel are our biggest headache now. I have 12 or 13 units that carry the show equipment. That doesn't count the trucks and trailers the entertainers use. We just don't know how high the cost of fuel is going to go. We use diesel fuel for travel and for maintaining generators, sometimes 24 hours a day."

"Zerbini's family stays involved. His youngest daughter, Erika, is on tour with the horses and two grandsons are employed, one with the lighting and one with animal care. Three daughters have traveled with him before.

"Zerbini no longer uses lions or tigers, which aren't per-

mitted to cross the border between the United States and Canada. Anthony and Jennifer Thomas guide the elephants through their paces. The Espanas work the wheel of destiny, extreme swing and motorcycles. The Campas family works with rolling globes, rola bola and sword balancing. Guillermina is the aerial ace and Piolita the star clown."

The Tarzan Zerbini Circus played its Western Canada Shrine route under canvas. Devin Chandler was ringmaster. The performance included the Eapanas, extreme swing and motorcycle globe; clown Piolita; Erika Zerbini, liberty horses; Dandino, rola bola; Guillermina, single trapeze; Markov's dogs; Martin and Visan, space wheel; Campas, juggling; Anthony and Jennifer Thomas, elephants.

The Jordan World Circus played the Syracuse, New York Shrine, April 4-6. Ari Steeples was ringmaster. The acts included Vincent Von Duke, wild animals; John Winn, motorcycle on incline wire; Sofia and Sara, aerial lyres; Susan Sheryl's dogs; Jozella, Spanish web; Miss Ashley, hula-hoops; Hartzell's cross-bow act; Dieter Galumbo, hand balancing; the Davide Zoppe monkeys; Steeple's bears; Jonathan, giant swing and the George Carden elephants.

Circus Gatti played the Los Angeles Shrine Circus, April 25-27. Justin Loomis was ringmaster. The performance was basically the same one presented in 2007. Gary Carson, illusionist, was added for this date. Other acts included Laura Herriott, Clydesdale horse and later a miniature pony act; Aaron Caballero's comedy car; Christie Wales, liberty pony drill; Jeremy Hernandez, juggler; and the Tosxanos, motorcycle globe.

The Hamid Circus played the Harrisburg Shrine, March 26-29. Kimball Keller was ringmistress. The acts included Campos family, rolling globes; Miss Viktoria, hula hoops and silks; Miss Natasha, aerialist; Darnell's dogs; Cuzin Grumpy's pig act and Derrick Rosaire's bears.

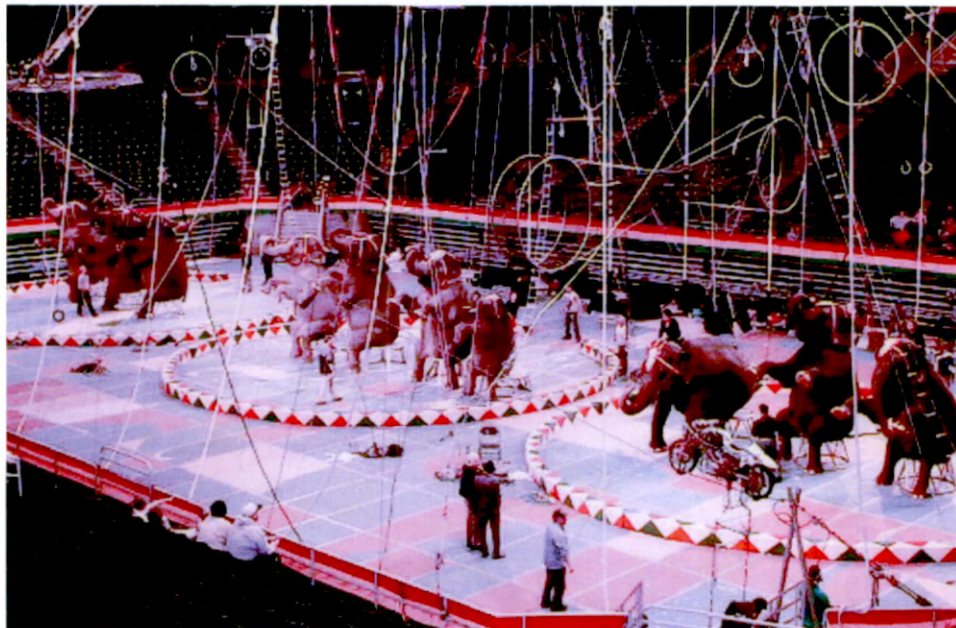
James Hamid produced the Melha Shrine Circus in West Springfield, Massachusetts in May. The performance included the Flying Pages; Adam Burch, tigers; Rolling Diamonds; the Barreda elephants and clown Nino Zoppe

James Christy Plunkett's James Christy Cole Circus provided the performance for the Lafayette, Louisiana Shrine on March 1. Plunkett played the Lincoln, Nebraska Shrine in June. The performance included Brian Franzen with a tiger act and elephants; Valencia family, gaucho act; Amanda and Victor, silk act; and Chief Redfeather, single horse.

Serge Coronas's Circus Hollywood opened the season at the Florida State Fair, February 7-18. Under a Canobbio tent the performance included Christa Coronas, hula-hoops; the Cristiani family, trampoline; Carlos Sanchez, high wire and motorcycle globe; Elaina and Christian, quick change act; Stevie Coronas, Friesian horses; and a Romanian flex bar act.

Ed Russell's Russell Bros. Family Fun circus played fairs in California. The Murcia family's Victoria Circus played the Vermont State Fair in Rutland late in August. The acts included Alex Murcia, trampoline and motorcycle globe and Victoria, high wire. It was at Stark County Fair in Canton, Ohio over Labor Day. Billy Martin's Cole All Star Circus played Elkland, Pennsylvania, January 21. The performance included Leo Garcia, strap act; Angela Martin, single trapeze; Brett Marshall, BMX bikes; Kim Sue, trampoline; and Letty Garcia, hula hoops, juggling and unicycles.

The Bindlestiff Family Cirkus Cavalcade of Youth appeared at the Zipper Factory in New York City, January 27 and April 20. The Posso Family Circus played the Topsham Fair in Topsham, Maine, August 3-9. The show was side walled. Two people did the whole performance, Luis Posso and daughter Rosalba. Luis did a high wire act, space wheel and clowning; and daughter Rosalba appeared on the aerial lyre. Wife Dolores handled the music and lights. Vincent and Pom Pom Von Duke presented their family circus at the Union, Maine fair, August 16-23.



The elephant number in a rehearsal of the Hadi Shrine performance. Jim Hall photo.

Veteran producer Paul Kaye again presented the Mother of all Shrine shows in Evansville, Indiana, November 27-30. It was the last of the true three ring circuses. The pre-show performance was a calliope concert and the Hadi Shrine clowns, followed by Clement Toca's band doing an overture while Natalia did a slide for life. The spec followed. It included a ten elephant long mount.

A series of aerial numbers was next, after which Hans and Judith Neger presented the Hawthorne wild animals. The local clowns filled the time while the cage was torn down. The Walters duo and the San Juan duo then performed cradle acts. Dog and goat acts followed. Then came the Apollo duo, Rebecca, and Amanda, in an aerial silk display. The ever-popular plate spinning followed, after which the Peiers duo and the Nicholas duo both did motorcycle acts on the inclined wire.

The performance got back on the ground with a foot juggler and two rola bola acts in the end rings. A comedy horse presentation called General Custer and Casper was up next.



Laura Herriott and her big horse on Loomis Bros. Circus. Jim Cole photo.

Then came the aerial ballet with eighteen beauties in the air, an astonishing number anymore.

Strong animal acts are a hallmark of the Hadi Shrine Circus. This year was no exception as Jim Hall's bears, the Rosaire-Zoppe chimps presented by Roger and Pam Zoppe, and Derrick Rosaire's bears filled the rings simultaneously. The Espanas with the wheel of destiny followed, and that was only the end of the first half.

Ten Carson and Barnes elephants opened the second half. They were followed by three rings of juggling, after which

the Winns performed their sway pole routine. The Kenya Wizards, an African acrobatic troupe, was next. The Martin duo with a platform motorcycle act followed. The performance concluded with a giant flag drop and fireworks. Joseph E. Bauer was the ringmaster and equestrian director, and Elizabeth Toca played the keyboard.

Loomis Bros. Circus, in its 12th year, played a four week during a late fall indoor and ball park tour of Florida. Justin "the singing ringmaster" Loomis had been with Kelly-Miller, Walker Bros. and Circus Gatti in recent years.

In 2008 he expanded his performance to three rings. A colorful backdrop with a back door curtain in the center added a big flash to the show. The music was recorded.

Loomis present a grand array of talent including clown John Kane; the Fusco brothers, juggling and Gaucho act; Alvarez family, acrobatics; Laura Herriott, pony and dog review, and big and little horses; Ariana Alvarez and Delaina Fusco, hula hoops; Crina Meda Alvarez, single trapeze; and Brian Franzen's exotic cats and elephants. Dick Kohlireser, the former king of burro basketball, handled the concessions. The show was in Okechobee, Florida on October 24 and Marianna, Florida, November 19. It also played a week of Christmas performances.

The Jose Cole Circus played McGregor, Iowa on February 28, although it didn't travel by steam boat. Clown Elmo Gibb was featured. Neil Goldberg's Cirque Dreams Jungle Fantasy opened on Broadway in New York City on June 16. The performance included Uranmandkh Amarsanna, contortionist; Dmytrak, foot juggler; Carly Sheridan and Ivan Dotsenko, trapeze duo; Vladimir Dovgan and Anatoli Yenyi, double rola bola and silks, double trapeze and rope jumping; and Serguei Slavski and Alexander Tolstikov, acrobats.

Bill Brickle's Wonderland Circus was in Varville, South Carolina on January 18. It featured the Russian Perfiyey, double trapeze; the Elain Campa Vazquez Trio, rolling globes; Brickle's dogs; Bruno Campa, rola bola; and Irina, Russian aerial triangle. The tour ended in Columbia, South



Kay and Clayton Rosaire.

Carolina on March 17.

Kay Rosaire held her 2008 Animal Extravaganza at her Big Cat Sanctuary on February 23-24 and March 1-2. The performance in a big top included Clayton Rosaire's four tigers, Tim Hernandez, rope act; Lisa Ross Rosaire with a miniature black stallion; Pam Rosaire-Zoppe, chimp; Carlos Svenson, comedy horse; Derrick Rosaire, Jr. with 14 bears; Caroline Williams, Frisian dressage stallion and Terry Frisco's elephants.



Larry Carden and the Carden elephants.

The George Carden Circus International played the Duluth, Minnesota Shrine in April. Audrey Michelle was ringmistress. The acts included Juergen Nerger with the Hawthorne tigers; the Flying Ponce; Larry Carden with elephant Bo and the big bull herd; Solis troupe, hand balancing; Dragomit troupe, teeterboard and motorcycle globe; clown Orlandito and Dave Smith, Sr., the human cannonball.

Carden played the Minneapolis Shrine, October 17-19. The show included Bruno Blaszak, tigers; the Flying Redpaths; Larry Carden with Bo the elephant, and a four elephant display; Johnny Peers, dogs; Joseph Bauer, space wheel; the Aerial Divas, silks, lyras and hoops; and Dave Smith, Sr., human cannonball.

Cindy Migley's Circus Spectacular played Moberly, Missouri, January 30; Columbia, Missouri January 31; St. Joseph, Missouri, February 1; Chanute, Kansas, February 3; Ponca City, Oklahoma, February 4 and Alva, Oklahoma, February 5. The show was in Edmonton, Alberta, March 7-9. The acts included Claude Chausser, horses; Gabrielle Segura, single trapeze; and juggler; Svetlana Gogolova, contortionist and chiffon; the Valencia family, Gaucho act and Joshua Cowling, elephant and camels.

Les Kimes' Circus Royal played the St. Paul, Minnesota Shrine early in April. Devin Chandler was ringmistress. The acts included clown Piolito; Flying Redpaths; Jim Hall's bears; T. J. Howell, unicycle; Irene Franzen, hula hoops; David Seebach, magic; James Plunkett, low wire, and Brian Franzen's elephants and wild animal act.

Tuffy Nicholas's Moscow International Circus returned to Southern California in mid-March, playing Anaheim on March 16. Robert Hatcher was ringmaster. The acts included Rappin' Granny; Elana and Robert Hatcher, BMX Daredevils; Berengere Naideniline's hula-hoops, strap act; Tony Campos, BMX bike on a ramp; Olga Manzhula Kazakhstan, contortionist; Evan and Mikiel, hand balancing; Sergei Vitkovsky, juggler; Alexander, cube juggling and Miss Fiorella, single traps.

Circus Bella played Dolores Park, California, September 27. The four member troupe presented trapeze, slack wire, juggling and clowning in one ring. It played private events, fairs, festivals and fundraisers.

The Lone Star Circus opened in Dallas late in December in the Center for Family Arts. It was the performing arm of the Lone Star Circus Arts Center, a non-profit, Dallas-based educational organization. Fanny Kerwich produced the show. The acts included Fanny Kerwich, hula hoops; clowns Dick Monday and Tiffany Riley; Jeff Lee, magician; Angelo Rodriguez, strap act; Vladimir Tsarkov, juggler; Serchmaa Byamba, contortionist; and the Osorio troupe, teeterboard.

Circus Minimus of Binghamton, New York was in its 16th year. Kevin O'Keefe, "The One-Man Circus in-a-Suitcase," was the whole show. The summer tour went from the Northeast to the Middle East. What other American circus played in front of the Pyramids in Cairo,

Egypt?

A number of Mexican shows toured the United States in 2008. Circus Vazquez, based in Brownsville, Texas played El Monte, California, March 24 to April 3. In November it played the Shea Stadium parking lot in Flushing, New York. Advertising was on Spanish radio and television. The performance included Virginia Tuells and Ihosvany, hand balancing and contortion; Calusari troupe, teeterboard and Russian bar; Alayn Alegria, single trapeze; Aldo Vazquez, mixed act with horses, camels and zebras; Olate Family, dog act; Poroto Family, clown boxing act; five women dancers and the Galvis Family, flying act. The wild animal act did not appear due to local regulations.

The American Crown Circus-Circo Osorio played Henderson, Nevada, near Las Vegas, March 11. The one ring performance was presented in a red and yellow sidewall, which



Circo Vazquez in Huntington Park, California in May. Jerry Cash photo.

was used on one day stands. The big top was used on multiday engagements. The acts included Raul Cubillas, juggler; Victor Abadilla, hand balancing; Perez family, Russian swing; Karinka, Spanish web; and Olivares Duo, space wheel. The show carried no animals.

Circo Nacional de Mexico played Las Vegas in April. The show was owned by the Ramos brothers. Two years ago the show was titled Sky Circus. The performance was presented under a red and white, four mast big top made in Mexico. The seating was on folding chairs. The acts included Alex Ramos, big and little horses; Richards brothers, juggling; Derilaysi, aerial hoop; Eduardo Romos and three riders in a motorcycle globe; the Figueva Family, dogs; and the Flying Rodogels. The show was in San Fernando, California, May 2-12.

The Esqueda brothers Circus Extravaganza played Sarasota, September 26. Jason Walker was ringmaster. The acts were the Great Oscar, rola bola; juggling in two rings; Master Lee, snakes; Marlene, Dagmar and Rebecca Ostroff, aeriasts; Jimmy and Sergio Zerbin, motorcycle globe; Giovana Cristiani, hula hoops; and Bones Craig's single elephant.

Jamie Garcia's Garcia Bros. Circus played Bradenton, Florida in the spring. The acts included Bardo Garcia on a space wheel; Jonathan, juggler; Yago and Bardo, Jr., rag doll routine and motorcycle globe, Mansi, contortionist; and

Esqueda Circus Extravagza in Sarasota. Jim Cole photo.



Diego Garcia, cannon act.

The Gibsonton Showfolks Circus, in January, was presented in the Walker Bros. Circus big top. Charles Schlarbaum's band furnished the show's music. Ward Hall was ringmaster. The acts were Elmo Gibb, miniature horse; Lance Ramos, camels, zebra, llamas and horses; Rebecca Ostroff, silks; April Dykes, rola bola; Jack Cook's comedy car; Kelsie Delmonte, aerial lyre; Tim Frisco's elephants.

The Russian American Circus played Morristown, New Jersey on January 8. The stage program included a black light opening; a tumbling act; baton spinning; plate spinning; unicycles; juggling; rolling globes; and rope jumping.

Peru, Indiana's International Circus Hall of Fame produced the French Lick (Indiana) Hall of Fame Circus on June 16. The Peru big top season was July 5 to July 27. On July 19 a dinner was held to honor new inductees the Great Unis and Tommy Hanneford.

The Hall of Fame produced a circus at the Indiana State Fair, August 6-17. The performance included John Fugate ringmaster; Susan Sheryll's dogs; Davide Zoppe, monkeys;



The Hall of Fame tent at French Lick, Indiana. Bill Rhodes photo.

Brian Franzen, elephant and Gianni Alvarez, hula hoops.

The Showfolks of Sarasota Circus took place in December. The program was coordinated by Noella Torres. The displays were Heidi Herriott, horseback riding ringmaster; Oscar the Magnificent, rola bola; King Gustav, goats; Aaron, Alex and Natalla, spinning cube; Aerial Storm, cradle; Miss Nicolette, circles of color; Kim Brothers, bareback juggling; Karen Valdez, contortionist; daredevil Henry, space wheel and the George Hanneford, Jr., elephants.

On April 18 the Illinois State University's Gamma Phi Circus brought legendary flyer Tony Steele, age 71, to join the IUS students in a flying trapeze act. Steele spent a month in Bloomington preparing the students. This was the first time in Gamma Phi's history that a flying trapeze act appeared in a performance.

Jim Cole kept track of all of the amateur circuses as



The Gamma Phi flying act with Tony Steele. Gamma Phi photo.

recorder of the Circus4Youth program of the Circus Fans Association. The number of camps, schools, and programs was impressive, and may auger well for the future of the circus in America. He reported on the following troupes: The Aerial Antics Circus was operated by the city of Vero Beach, Florida recreation department. Their 34th annual circus performance was held August 6-9. The Berkshire Children's Circus Camp of Pittsfield, Massachusetts celebrated its 16th year under the sponsorship of the Berkshire Community College. The Circus Arts Camp of Westchester, New York trained children on the trampoline, unicycle, single traps and juggling. Camp Skyline in Mentone, Alabama provided instruction in juggling and the flying trapeze. The Hiccup Circus in Pahoa, Hawaii promoted the healthy development of children and the community through circus skills.

St. Paul, Minnesota's Circus Juventas titled its 2008 production Raven's Manor. The acts included Shannon Maguire, Sam Finkelstein and Alex McKendry, Russian barre; Anna Ostroushko and Eli Schlater, still traps; Rachel Butler and Jonah Finkelstein, wire act; a large teeterboard

A youngster on the wheel in the Fern Street Circus. Circus4Youth.



presentation by the company and juggling. Sixty-five people appeared in the show. The Florida State University's Flying High Circus was a summer attraction in Panama City Beach, Florida. However, the show was closed after only three weeks due to poor ticket sales. The annual spring circus on the FSU campus was very successful. The Great All-American Youth Circus opened in Redlands, California April 25. The show was a product of the Redlands YMCA. The Gym Dandies Children's Circus was presented in Scarborough, Maine. The Hope Street Circus was an after school program conducted by the Hope Street Family Center in

downtown Los Angeles. The program allowed students to use circus arts to teach life skills. The children were taught juggling, tight rope, pyramid building, stilt walking and unicycle.



The Middletown Children's camp. Circus4Youth.

The PAL Sailor Circus of Sarasota, Florida, sponsored by the Sarasota Police Athletic League presented two performance engagements each year. Among the outstanding acts were a teeterboard act and flying trapeze act. The Sailor Circus played Sarasota, March 26-29 and April 2-5. A performance was given on April 16 for the Circus Fans Association convention. Circus Smirkus presented 71 performances in fourteen New England towns, opening in Greensboro, Vermont on June 28. The tour closed back in Greensboro on August 15-16. The 2008 show was titled Smirkusology, A Science Extravaganza. The acts included Taylor Wright-Sanson and Owen Winship, cyclists; Kia Eastman and Lindsay Culbert-Olds, double traps; and Leidy Tatiana, Zainga Vidal and Francisco Javier Hartado, balancing act.

Chicago's CircEstreem's mission was to unite youth from diverse racial, cultural and economic backgrounds and help them build self-esteem and mutual respect through the practice of circus arts. Circus of the Kids in Tallahassee, Florida, presented swinging ladders and triple trapeze. The Circus Day Foundation of St. Louis, Missouri, taught life lessons through circus education. Tito Gaona's Flying Trapeze School in Sarasota, Florida and Brookline, Massachusetts



Wenatchee Youth Circus teeterboard act. Circus4Youth.

conducted classes in the flying trapeze and circus arts. The Wenatchee Youth Circus of Wenatchee, Washington, presented its 55th season in 2008. The show was considered one of the top nonprofessional troupes in the country. Traveling on trucks it played in western states from California to Alaska, traveling 12,000 miles a year playing in football and baseball fields as well as rodeo grounds and indoor arenas.



Inside the Smirkus big top. Circus4Youth.

The Circus School of Arizona, located in Scottsdale and Chandler, offered aerial acts instructed by Rachel Stegman. Simply Circus operated a summer camp in Newton, Massachusetts on the grounds of the Nobscoot Scout Reservation. The iFly flying trapeze (school) was located in Long Island, New York. Its instructors brought a variety of athletic and artistic backgrounds. Its mission was teaching the art of the flying trapeze. Cirque Amongus, a Livonia, Michigan residency program, offered instruction in juggling and balancing. The Actors Gymnasium was located in Evanston, Illinois. Their spring show was titled "Neverwhere." The school offered instruction and work shops in aerial work. Wild Rumpus Circus in Mezomaine, Wisconsin, taught stilt walking, juggling, and pantomime at a summer camp.

The New England Center for Circus Arts in Brattleboro, Vermont, offered people of all ages and abilities an oppor-

tunity to experience the magical and captivating world of circus arts. The Fern Street Circus in San Diego, California, was founded in 1990 by John Highkin and Cindy Zimmerman. It performed in Balboa Park. The Amazing Grace Circus in Nyack, New York started in 2002 as a result of the events of 9/11 when sixteen teenagers in a local youth group wanted to send a message of hope to a community that was saddened by its losses.

The Sandou Theatrical Circus School, located in Las Vegas, was housed in a new state-of-the-art facility with 7,000 square feet of space. It was founded and is owned by Sergei and Konstantin Sandou, who have more than twenty years of performing with European and American circuses. The B.E.S.T. educational program in Boise, Idaho offered a circus program. The Starfish Circus in Kalamazoo, Michigan provided a circus program to schools. In ten to fourteen days its coaches taught up to fifty students in aerial skills, partner acrobatics, clowning, juggling and showmanship, as well as stretching and conditioning. The Zip Zap Circus USA in Washington, D. C. was founded in 2006 as a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to supporting youth participation in circus arts as a tool for transformation and empowerment, whatever that means.

My Nose Turns Red Theater Company in Covington, Kentucky, offered a program for more than 150 children. It taught globe walking, tight wire, juggling and unicycle. The School of Acrobats and New Circus Arts in Seattle, Washington was founded in 2004. Jo Montgomery, the co-founder, had a nursing background. Chuck Johnson, a Portland businessman, went to Seattle each weekend to work without pay during the school's first year. The school has been self-supporting for four and a half years. The school started a youth circus group in 2006.

The Peru circus was one of the top amateur shows in the country. It performed in its hometown from July 12-19, presenting high wire and flying trapeze arts. On May 10 a furniture store next to the Peru Amateur Circus arena caught fire. The store burned and a wall collapsed. One wall of the circus building was damaged. Circus officials struggled to clean up afterwards. The damage was more extensive in the arena than was first thought. However, repairs were made and the performances were given on

The Peru Circus high wire act. Circus4Youth.



the announced dates. The American Youth Circus Organization held its 2008 Educator Conference in Boulder, Colorado, October 10-12.

The 50th season of the Circus World Museum opened on May 17, 2008. A feature was the Classic American Circus show presented in the Moeller Hippodrome. With David SaLoutos as ringmaster the acts included the Fusco brothers, juggling and Gaucho drumming; Susan Vidbel Ashton, cloud swing; clown Neil Skoy; and Svetlana Fedenov, juggling large objects. The Razzle Dazzle Review was given at 1:00 p.m. It included Tom Demry's dog act; Tatiana Fusco, aerial lyre; the Fedenov Duo, comedy acrobatics; Delana Fusco, hula hoops; and Michael and Susan Ashton, foot juggling.



The flood at the Circus World Museum.

A terrible flood struck the museum grounds on June 7-8 when the Baraboo River over flowed it banks. It was followed by a second deluge on June 12. Nine buildings were flooded and two railroad cars were badly damaged. The museum was forced to close for five days at the height of its season. The Circus of Chefs gala fundraiser on June 29 netted \$143,000 to benefit the Museum.

In March it was announced that the Great Circus Parade would return to Milwaukee on July 12, 2009. Twenty of the Museum's historic wagons were trucked to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin where they were displayed, September 19-22. The funding was from philanthropist Richard Driehaus.

On October a 30-year old man and a juvenile were arrested in connection with a fire that burned a corner of the C. P. Fox Wagon Restoration Building. Apparently the two dumped gasoline into the garbage cans and lit them.

John Ringling's private car, the Wisconsin, arrived at the Ringling Art Museum, in Sarasota late in the year, arriving from Montgomery, Alabama. The car was built by the Pullman Company and was used by John and Mable Ringling from 1905 to 1916.

Dick Monday's New York Goofs conducted their Ultimate Clown School, July 28 to August 9, on the museum grounds. The 2008 show was titled America's Got Clowns. The Chinese Acrobats performed on the stage of the museum's Asolo Theater from June 25 to July 24.

Rev. George "Jerry" Hogan's responsibilities at St. Michael's parish in North Andover, Massachusetts took precedent over his circus ministry, not allowing him to travel as much as in past years. It was not until Labor Day that he was able to reach out to his circus family. He was attacked by PeTA. The organization wrote to Bishop Cardinal Sean O'Malley asking he be removed from the circus because they treat animals poorly. Letters were also sent to a Boston newspaper. The animal rights group didn't like the publicity he received in Tampa for blessing the elephants on Ringling-Barnum and the lions at Kay Rosaire's compound. Cardinal Sean met with Father Hogan and was assured of his support in ministering to the circus people and their animals. During the year Hogan celebrated five Baptisms, one First Communion, four Confirmations and one Funeral. In 2008 Father Jerry spent ninety-one days in Circus Ministry on the road and in the New England area.

The following people left the sawdust trail in 2008. Tommy Baker, ringmaster; Allen Bloom, former Ringling-Barnum executive; Lottie Brunn, juggler; Tom Cooper, clown and show painter; Mark David Pilger, aerialist; Lola Dobritch, performer; Corsetta Cristiani, rider; Mauricio "Lit" Droguett, office man; Gee Gee Engesser, performer; Bobby Fairchild, performer; Bobby Hakes, performer; Tom Hodgini, performer; Terrell "Punch" Jacobs, animal trainer; Paul Miller, circus owner; Peggy Henderson MacDonald, elephant presenter; Robert S. MacDougall, former Ringling-Barnum executive; Harry Mills, show owner; Silvana Zachini Melussi, human cannon ball; Lucky Larabee, ringmaster; Bill Lee, coach; Rex Rossi, performer; Tony Smaha, animal trainer; Charlie Smith, trainmaster; Al Vidbel, elephant man and circus owner.

Father Jerry Hogan.



The following contributed information and photos for this article: Pete Adams, Ernest Albrecht, Clark Beurlen, Billl Biggerstaff, Chuck Burnes, Jerry Cash, Jim Cole, William Curtin, Don Covington, Donald Fairbanks, Steve Flint, David Hammarstrom, John Hart, Paul Horsman, Fred Hoffman, Harry L. Kingston, John Polacsek, Maxine House, Fr. Jerry Hogan, John Goodall, Paul Gutheil, Paul Ingrassia, Brian LaPalme, Edward Meals, Crash Moreau, Barbara Moore, Joseph Meyers, Bill Rector, Fred D. Pfening III, Richard J. Reynolds III, Bill Rhodes, Dale Riker, Ron Sanford, Alex Smith, Bob Sugerman, Timothy Tegge, Ben Trumble, Gordon Turner, John Wells and Herbert Ueckert.



Moonlight Lady rolls on with show personnel seen riding the entire length of the train's coach section from on board.

MOONLIGHT LADY:

A Circus Train Adventure

By Rhett Coates

Copyright © 2009

El Paso Bound

Load out Sunday, June 14, 1987.

For me, as a musician/singer, actor and railroad enthusiast, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey (RBBB) Circus came as a timely answer to prayers for a job where these interests might be combined. I'm always asked about life with Ringling, and thought it would be fun to share a personal, written account of a ride aboard. So, in the tradition of legendary film director (and circus fan) Cecil B. DeMille, I chose to write about a trip of epic proportions, and one in June of 1987 fit the bill.

First, here is one note of background historical importance to begin this feature: how the "Edition Numbers" work for the two railroad shows. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey came under the ownership of the Feld Family as of 1968, when Irvin and Israel Feld purchased The Greatest Show On Earth from the Ringling-North family, and the Feld brothers had something special in mind to reinvigorate the show. Their idea, born of long-time experience as aggressively successful American concert tour promoters, would see two complete RBBB tours as of 1970. With their first circus tour



The author, seen aboard his 1987 home RBX 55, built the same month he was born, March 1961. Photo was taken in Venice, Florida, December 1987. Brooks Farmer photo.

(the 99th Edition) going out on a two-year tour as of 1969, and termed the "Red Unit," they set about hiring acts for another RBBB tour, calling their second show the "Blue

Generator/dorm car RBX 55, seen in Miami, Florida. This was the author's home in 1987. Author's photo.





Tear-down and load out. The author, seen in t-shirt, at work. Author's photo.

Unit" (which, in 1970, was the 100th Anniversary Edition.)

The Red Unit takes all odd numbered editions of The Greatest Show On Earth on the two-year tour beginning each odd-numbered year. The Blue Unit takes all even numbered editions of The Greatest Show On Earth beginning each even-numbered year. Thus, twice as many cities can be played in a given year, which means twice the fun for "children of all ages." The actual edition numbers are measured from the original P.T. Barnum show of 1871. This measure of show years made the 1987 Red Unit the "117th Edition."

The first half of the 1987 "Concert Route" (or Gravy Route), which the first half of a contemporary two-year RBBB tour is sometimes called, had been in Philadelphia at the time the events of this story took place. As of 1987, the stand after Philadelphia would occur way across the continent, usually Tulsa, or Oklahoma City. The show would then move on to Tucson and Phoenix before heading into California by the third quarter of the Concert Route. Tulsa had been on the "Rodeo Route" (the second half of the two year RBBB tour) until 1988, when the show's 118th Edition (the Blue Unit) skipped Tucson due to a boat show being scheduled in that town's arena the only week RBBB had open for their show's Concert Route. Tulsa was shifted to the Concert Route to fill in the gap.

The longest single train run, or "jump" in circus parlance, between cities is said to have occurred before 1900 when the Nickel Plate Circus, owned by W. H. Harris, moved from Halifax to Winnipeg, 2200 miles. This record was broken in June 1987 when RBBB's Red Unit made a jump from Philadelphia to El Paso, Texas, on a four-day, 2,336-mile train run through seven states and over five railroad lines. The Pie Car's menu board noted it with little fanfare, simply listing the date each day over the phrase: "EL PASO-BOUND." It's been said that "It's the going, and not the getting there, that's good," and this experience inspired me to write about what I would come to call the Moonlight Lady.

Load Out: Sunday Evening, June 14, 1987

An Amtrak television commercial lyric once went, "There's something about a train that's magic!" It's an extra special magic that we'll share with children of all ages as

they witness our passing through their hometowns tomorrow through Thursday. Now, please by my guest as The Greatest Show On Earth tears down the 117th edition, the "King Tusk" tour, and begins a journey to remember!

Our route for this train run is to be: Conrail (CR) from Philadelphia to East St. Louis, Illinois--via Horseshoe Curve. Conrail Train I. D.: "CIR 111-14" (Conrail Train #111, departing Philadelphia on June 14). Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis (TRRA) over the Mississippi River via Merchant's Bridge. Our interchange in St. Louis, Mo. is Burlington Northern (BN) Railroad over the former "Frisco" to Ft. Worth, Texas. Union Pacific (UP)

Railroad from Ft. Worth, Texas to El Paso, via Odessa. Our final arrival and spotting on Southern Pacific (SP) Railroad in El Paso.

In less than three hours, wagons full of show equipment and materials are packed and lined up along the street leading to Conrail's Greenwich Yard along the adjacent, overhead Interstate-95 bridge for loading onto the show's flatcars. A short time ago the Philadelphia Spectrum was a musical, light-filled fantasyland of excitement and mirth. Now it is but an empty shell of concrete, vacant of the famed sawdust and popcorn, as heralded by Cecil B. DeMille in his 1952 circus movie, filmed on tour with this show during 1951--the show's 81st edition. This is 1987, and the departure of The Greatest Show On Earth's 117th edition has left the backstage area with a tinge of loneliness, punctuated by empty tables, scattered chairs, and litter strewn across hallways and dressing room floors. I'm the last circus employee to leave, after a phone call home to tell my mother we'll be riding the Circus Train for the next four days. Her comment: "Good grief!" Now, imagine sixty families of five simultaneously packing for an extended vacation (appearing somewhat like an organized madhouse) and you'll have the perfect picture of the midnight scene before us at the circus train. After a late meal, it's off to sleep before we ride off into the night, El Paso bound.

Day One: Monday, June 15, 1987

It's 3:30 a.m. somewhere in the Pennsylvania countryside. I awaken with a tickling cough in my throat, caused by cold air blowing into my upper berth from an open vent in the car's ceiling. After clearing my throat, I reach out from behind the gray, plastic curtain, holding tightly onto the curtain rod to keep from falling to the floor below, and push the vent's slats closed. I lie back on the sagging mattress and stare outside through the tiny window to my left. An occasional street light flashes by as the Circus Train rumbles swiftly through the silvery, moon-lit night.

Continuous welded rail under us makes the ride exceptionally smooth, resulting in a gentle, bouncy sway. The consistent motion makes me sleepy, but then I catch a glimpse of a sign outside that reveals our location: Pottstown. I reach up and pull down on the chain that turns on the light bulb above me, and glance in my Rand McNal-



Late in the year the Moonlight Lady rolls north bound on Southern Pacific near Mt. Shasta in northern California. Bill V. Atkins photo. author's collection.

ly railroad atlas to find that this route takes us through Hershey, Pennsylvania. I quickly decide against my better judgment to stay awake. Perhaps I'll smell the chocolate being made there as we ride by, and maybe I'll even see the town's streetlights that are shaped like giant Hershey Kisses.

At a quarter 'till four, we're slithering through Reading, and I'm watching the night-time scenery from my usual hangout during train-runs: the vestibule between cars RBX 56 and RBX 57, a car and a half ahead of my home aboard RBX 55. (The show would eventually change their railcar reporting marks to "RBBX" – as of 1995, and part of that change would see the current "RBX" numbers becoming sequential "House Numbers" which would allow train residents to find their homes each night after work.) The train's movement still makes me drowsy, rocking me like a baby in a cradle, but I force up the will power to remain awake at least until we pass Hershey. The countryside's residents sleep peacefully, unaware we're quietly bisecting their towns and farms.

After waiting briefly for a 123-car Conrail eastbound freight train, our westward journey resumes after we get a proceed signal. Just around the curve from the junction is large factory complex where a uniformed security guard steps forward with curiosity, no doubt wondering what kind of passenger train has such extremely powerful spot lights above every coach vestibule, brightly illuminating the surrounding right-of-way like a city street rolling by. The point when he sees it's the Circus Train is obvious: he yells and laughs out loud, clapping his hands together like a child at his first Christmas. He sees me riding in the vestibule between cars '56 and '57, and yells, "Where are you headed?" "TEXAS!" I shout back, and he lets out a whoop of excitement. Ten cars ahead, Conrail SD50-type, General Motors-built locomotives 6797, 6807 and 6709 bite down hard with their combined 10,700 horsepower to lift our 3,520 tons out of Reading, raising the dust, and our speed . . . we're highballing at 55 mph by 4:00 a.m.

At 4:15 a.m., a fast train full of Trailers On Flat Cars (a

"TOFC" train: carrying lots trucks that would otherwise be crowding up the highways) flashes by on the parallel track going the other way just west of Sheridan, with the trailers rolling by us so fast in the opposite direction that they appear as a single streak of white and silver. It disappears around a curve with a flashing End-Of-Train-Device on the last car's coupler. Another TOFC train flashes by at 4:25 a.m., following the previous train, and we begin slowing so crossing gates in Lebanon have time to lower and protect motorists. Only two vehicles wait for our passing, a newspaper delivery truck and an automobile. In the latter, the driver hits his high beams, illuminating the large red and white banners on the coach sides. There must be something very special about the name

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, for I see him smile and wave to me as I ride by. Yes, I wave back!

Speed resumes, and after 4:40 a.m. comes the faint hint of the coming dawn as the horizon behind us begins showing a bright band of blue over purple. Rails of the parallel track reflect like mercury in the bright moonlight, and I stare at them, leaning on the bottom Dutch door while sitting on a stool. The rails' continuity is mesmerizing; their silvery sheen feels soothing, almost to the point of romance, as if I were in love with the Circus Train itself, some mysterious, silvery lady. Moonlight Lady! Yes! Perhaps it's beyond understanding, akin to that elusive, secretive wonder of The Greatest Show On Earth: INTEGRITY.

It's 4:45 a.m. Hershey, Pennsylvania! Whooshing by the twin stacks of the world-famous factory, I catch the unmistakably sweet smell of chocolate. The streetlights here really are shaped like giant Hershey Kisses, some silver as if wrapped, some brown as if not. To the right, the red, flashing beacon of the Kiss Tower in Hershey Park flashes a silent "Hello" as we glide by (RBBB would play here in subsequent years). After we pass the Reese Cup factory a few miles west, I walk back to my car, RBX 55, the 11th car of this 44-car train, and home to 22 workingmen. (Note that curious combination of dual numbers: it's not just those that capture my personal affection, either. I discovered in 1985 (my first year on the show) that this car, former Union Pacific baggage car #6313, was built the same month I was born: March, 1961. And there was more: the show's I.R.S. Asset Identification Number for this railroad car is the same last 4 digits in my Social Security Number! The spooky "Twilight Zone" theme music plays in my mind with that revelation.)

I'm half way through car 56 when we bounce over a rough Turnout (track switch); my shoulder hits a window frame to my left, and my other shoulder bounces off someone's door to my right. "Ouch," I say to no one in particular, and continue, briefly holding both shoulders.

The vestibule between '56 and '55 is alive with the sound of steel wheels rolling over jointless steel rails, as I push open the heavy wooden, red-painted door of the railroad car I and twenty-one others call home. The narrow corridor at this end separates roomettes built into either side; show

employees with wide shoulders must turn slightly sideways to get through. One of the four neon lights in the corridor is on, nearest the '56 end, so it won't shine through cracks or openings in the curtains of the fourteen, 6-foot Upper and Lower berths just past the roomettes. I reach my upper berth, last on the left toward car RBX 54 (next car behind '55), and since there is no ladder, I have to step on a corner of the lower berth ("Always on my shoulder!" often complains the occupant). Reaching up, I grab the curtain iron and swing up like a chimpanzee. Lying back; adjusting the pillow; off with the light--and the gentle, bouncy sway rocks me to sleep in time to miss the Conrail crew change in Harrisburg at sunrise. . . .

I'm just up and awake at 9 a.m. on Horseshoe Curve (several miles west of Altoona). Across the corridor is another window through which I can see the rear half of our train going the other way--with no caboose. Outside, the sun is burning late-hanging fog off the mountainside, thick with June greenery. Our progress uphill is slow, and soon a frightening roar rattles my window! Pusher units, in the middle of a long freight train, are lifting their charge alongside us on the outside mainline, the thunder of the highest throttle-notch fully waking me. I quickly get dressed and exit into the '55-'56 vestibule for a look around to see low gondola cars on each end of the mid-train locomotives, explaining why I hadn't noticed the freight train from my upper berth window before hearing it. We're on the center of three tracks where once there were four (Conrail removed one track since the close of the Pennsylvania Railroad/Penn Central days.) on what was known to railroaders as "The Broadway." We stop at Galatin Tunnel, apparently to wait on a proceed signal, but then move ahead again almost as soon, passing the freight train before having a chance to yawn.

By 10:05 a. m. I've made my way back thirteen cars, just over 1/4 mile, to RBX 42, the Pie Car (old-time Circus nickname for the show's dining car), for a cereal breakfast as we roll through Johnstown. Between bites of cereal and paragraphs of a Philadelphia Inquirer article about Conrail, I notice steelworkers outside, pausing in their tasks to watch us pass and wave to any circus people riding outside in the vestibules. We're crawling upon entering Seward, and after five minutes of riding along at 10 mph, we stop. It's 10:35 a.m. On a radio monitor, we hear the Conrail conductor tell Circus Trainmaster, Tim Holan, that a train ahead is having problems and we'll be delayed.

10:42 a.m. WHAM!! If I hadn't already finished my orange juice, I'd be wearing it now. These whacks usually wake up everyone on board, and sure enough, in moments, one of them enters the Pie Car. Clad in brown bathrobe and sandals, and sporting blood-shot eyes, tiger handler T. J. Robinson looks around indignantly and blurts out, "Who's driving this train? I just got jarred out of bed!" Moonlight Lady, aroused into the Allegheny daylight, rolls until 11:25 when a red signal brings her to a halt. She starts out again at 11:40, this time with a smooth start, crossing over to run "Wrong Main" [like driving on a street in England] around hi-rail vehicles, returning to the right-hand main track at Traff (Trafford, Pennsylvania) interlocking.

It's downtown Pittsburgh at half past noon (I would reside directly across the river at the Allegheny Center



Red unit's 1987 water truck ascends the runs, boarding the train's flat cars. Author's collection.

apartments from 1992 to 1994 while attending The Art Institute of Pittsburgh's school of Music & Video Business--but that is unknown to me on this day.) and people in the Amtrak station give us the once-over, twice. Businessmen wave from adjacent office towers, while pedestrians at street level below stare up at the elevated track and wave as well. Across the river, construction gangs at work on the new 279 expressway, which ends in a pile of dirt and is obviously still not open for traffic, watch in astonishment as the seemingly endless passenger train crosses the Allegheny River, car after silver-gray car curving around the bend right before their very eyes.

Twenty-three miles west of here, our arrival at the next Conrail crew-change point is at 1:30 p.m., where 45 minutes is spent alongside Highway 65 (Ohio River Blvd.) at the town of Freedom, Pennsylvania--the west end of Conway Yard--feeding and watering the animals up front in the four stock cars, directly behind the locomotives. Our three engines (one of which has "failed" in transit) are replaced with two freshly-fueled ones: CR 6840, an SD40-2 type unit built by General Motors Corp. and former demo unit EMD-1, now sporting bright blue Conrail paint; and CR 6557, a C30-7 type locomotive built by General Electric. I nod off as this takes place, catching up on sleep I should have gotten before dawn.....

It's 5:00 p. m., and I wake to find us running "Wrong Main" again. We wind our way through mountains full of cool brooks, singing birds and endless thick, green forests. Enjoying the rolling vista are dozens of circus employees, crowding the vestibules up and down the entire train, which I pass on my way to the Pie Car for supper. For many, this is their first time in America, and they remark on how they are enjoying the relaxing ride. This is the "romantic" side of Circus life, and a pleasant way to spend four days off if, like me, you are a railroad enthusiast. I consider this facet of the show usually not seen by the public, stopping in almost every vestibule along the hike back through the train to make certain I don't miss anything trackside--taking my time to reach the Pie Car. I really do enjoy this, so much so that wanting food takes second place to the Circus Train Adventure!

It's amazing how many streets intersect the double-track Conrail mainline in Canton, Ohio, where the rail line cuts



A cut of wagons behind the water truck rolls down the flats. Author's collection.

through town diagonally with highway crossings every half-block. The going through here is slow (most likely due to the safety factor of negotiating the sheer number of highway grade crossings), and a lady at a softball game sees us and begins a crazed dance, yelling and clapping her hands together. A player in the outfield turns and shouts to teammates: "Hey--Ringling Brothers!" They all stop the game and wave, while the locomotives struggle upgrade with our tonnage, shouting with the thundering echo of the throttle in #8-Notch (the highest power setting), reverberating loudly off adjacent buildings.

Just west of town is a school where several sports teams are practicing on ball fields beside the railroad. A sign says "Home of the Panthers," and many athletes take five as we cruise by, waving and catching a breath. Beyond the school grounds is a highway grade crossing where a waiting car virtually erupts open with two children and a man with camera in hand. Beyond the crossing we stop again, and according to a radio scanner, a passing freight train's crew saw what they thought was a circus wagon on our last flatcar which appeared to have shifted too close to the edge. In car RBX 41, Train Electrician Jon Bell is just settling in for a relaxing evening and taking off his shoes, when Tim Holan's voice calls him over the radio, dispatching Jon eighteen cars to the rear to check it out. Finding it only a bit off-center, he relays the information to Tim (who is in his home aboard car '57), and sprints home. We start out again as soon as he boards the coaches, ahead of schedule.

At Orrville, Ohio, I'm finally sitting down to dinner in the diner, or in this case, hotdogs in the Pie Car. My two hot franks, generous helpings of baked beans and corn, heaping salad, two slices of Wonder Bread and large milk took only \$3.75 from my wallet (yes, we pay for food on the Circus Train, but at a reasonable price). I've often thought that anything will taste good if you wait for it long enough, and I haven't eaten anything since breakfast in Johnstown. Tonight's Mainline, as the main course meal on the Circus Train is so eloquently called, tastes fine. Past Orrville, and to the left, is a sizeable collection of vintage railroad rolling stock, coaches and equipment tucked away on sidings, including at least one large steam locomotive. Famous steam locomotive Nickel Plate #765, I presume?

I've finished eating my Mainline at 6:40 p. m. as outside it's getting darker, and ominous clouds fill the horizon. We enter Wooster, Ohio, identified by rows of yellow school

buses east of town. Pie Car cook Lowell Downer remarks on the low turnout of people to eat in the Pie Car tonight, probably owing to many who might be cooking their own meals on the many stoves, microwaves or hotplates that are located inside individual quarters throughout the train. This section of Conrail is bumpy, jointed rail, and Chief Electrician Carl Ritter enters the Pie Car with a frown, comparing his walk from 55-Car to "being inside a pinball machine."

By 7 p.m., we've by-passed most of the storm clouds, and a dull-orange band of pale light hangs above the horizon ahead. Lowell perhaps shouldn't have spoken so soon, for now the Pie Car fills with hungry Circus people. A showgirl and at least three concessions vendors show up just in time

for an important kitchen appliance to break down. After five minutes of fiddling with the errant item, Lowell and two other cooks have managed to resume business, at least for the moment, but for the old mechanical cash register to get stuck. After five minutes of fiddling with the drawer, Lowell and two other cooks have managed to open it for business, but the problem isn't fixed before I depart RBX 42, heading home. It is 7:15 p.m.

I exit onto the vestibule between cars '42 and '43, pausing to see the scenery. We're traveling through a heavily wooded area with small farms dotting the landscape every few miles like parts in a curtain. I lean out a bit to see ahead along the track, and a bug flies smack into my left eyeball. Great. Now my eye stings with smashed bug, and I must make an effort to walk forward. Rubbing the remains from my eye, I negotiate the narrow passageway between RBX 42's two, roaring Caterpillar 3406 "Genset" diesel-powered electrical generators, the wind ripping across the open deck of the car while the train bounces wildly down the track at 50 mph. Try that stunt with one eye shut! By the time I've gone two car lengths forward, the bug is almost gone, but I look as if I were crying. A passing workman, train-walking back toward the Pie Car, gives me strange looks.

I pause in the '44-'45 vestibule, where greenery hangs above me in a planter, swaying to the rhythm of the rails; there's no place like home. At 7:30 we blast through Mansfield, where a Conrail employee beside the line on our right snaps photos of us on a curve just past the yard office. West of town we parallel a CSX (former Baltimore & Ohio) rail line until it veers away, and I resume my train-walk home, confident no one else will notice my tear-stained left eye. (No else one does.)

In the next vestibule is a party going on with loud, blaring radio and loud talking over the din. The last thing I need now, with bug in my eye and a headache coming on, is loud music; I continue forward through the train. The heavy door at the '47-end of RBX 48 increases the pressure around my forehead as I strain to force it open while the train bounces down the track with the rough ride a bit more noticeable with the handicap of smashed bug distracting me from an otherwise enjoyable train ride. In car '49, tin foil taped against the windows for added insulation rattles with a metallic sound as I pass. The food being cooked in rooms here, as in many of the cars, smells inviting: recipes from all over the world. And the Moonlight Lady rumbles on.

We stop in Crestline, Ohio for another Conrail crew-change that lasts all of four minutes (the relief crew has been taxied to Crestline; CTC ["Code Failure"] Centralized Traf-

fic Control"] is occurring here, as well, which may slow our progress just a bit). I've stepped off to look around when the train's airline begins filling almost immediately, the audible hiss informing me that the brakes are releasing and we're about to depart. I'm back aboard and closing the door as we begin moving, turning left onto the line toward Indianapolis. It's 8:00 p.m. On this lazy evening, many Ohio residents witness our fleeting pass through their home towns. Many of the townsfolk of Galion wave and cheer, exciting Iona Antal, one of the ladies of our Romanian troupe. In the '52-'53 vestibule, she jumps up and down, giggling as she waves to Americans in their front yards. "This is great fun!" she says, yelling an accented "Hello!" to all, sharing the universal greeting of a wave from a train. What a tremendous thrill it is for so many foreign performers to be given the opportunity to share our mutual love of a Circus Train Adventure! This is part and parcel of what it is to be one of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Family.



Two photos here show the wagons ascending the runs. Second view shows circus train crew using chocks strategically following the last wagon's wheels to keep any stopped movement from rolling back off the runs, a long standing safety practice. Author's collection.

The loud clatter of the train's wheels over the two double-tracked diamond rail-rail crossings with the C&O and N&W railroads in Marion, Ohio, within a coach-length of each other, reverberate loudly off adjacent buildings. West of town we slow to a crawl as I finally arrive in the '55-'56 vestibule for a last look around before going to bed. Looking back, I notice a pair of legs dangling from the platform of an apparently open '55-'54 vestibule, and in less than a minute, Tim Holan walks by with his radio, wearing a frown. The legs soon vanish and the door is closed. I go inside '55, passing Tim, who is returning to his home aboard '57 with a sigh. Playing monkey again, I swing up into my bunk, drop my shoes to the floor below, close the curtain and lie down, rubbing my temples and left eyeball.

We stop again. A moment later we move, but very slowly (RBBB personnel sometimes call this train the "Silver Snail"), as to our right the headlights of passing automobiles on parallel Highway 95 (Marion Agosta Rd.) flash by. I glance outside my window. Overhead, the now dull blue sky is filled with rows of cotton-candy pink Stratus clouds, and a huge yellow-orange sun sinks slowly across the flat farmland. As RBX 55 rocks slowly back and forth over the jointed rail, I lay my head heavily on the pillow, and with eyes burning from fatigue, dust and dirt blown up from the tracks into the

vestibules, lack of sleep and bug remains, I fall fast asleep.

I would miss seeing the Indianapolis skyline as we departed Conrail's Big Four Yard at 1:25 a.m., as well as the crossing of the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad in Effingham, Illinois at 4:33 a.m. I also wouldn't watch as we tip-toed through Altamont at 4:47 a.m. No, I would be off in another world, where Moonlight Lady was being hauled by the likes of steam-powered locomotives such as Union Pacific's Challenger #3985, N&W Class-A #1218 or N&W Class-J #611, Nickel Plate #765, Southern Pacific Daylight #4449, and more.

Day Two: Tuesday, June 16, 1987

It's 6:30 a.m., and I wake as we grind to a halt amidst the misty, rolling farmland of Illinois. A 95-car eastbound freight train passes us, and then we move out onto single track, accelerating to a steady 50mph. Moving outside to the '56-'57 vestibule, I enjoy the scenery—somehow different from yesterday's—for about 20 minutes when my stom-



ach rudely informs me that it's time for breakfast. I begin to walk toward the Pie Car.

The hallway in RBX 56 emits the smooth hum of the wheels on ribbon rail, and RBX 55 is but a quite rumble with swaying light cords and curtains along each bunk; sleep is peaceful when the train rolls consistently. Doors to clowns' roomettes in RBX 54 are decorated with theatrically-oriented posters and stickers, such as Charlie Chaplin, and The Wizard of Oz. A bright, red feather hat pokes out from a small door-opening of one roomette.

In RBX 53, performers' clothes swing to the train's pitch and yaw, hanging from window ledges and door frames, their wearers sound asleep. Car '52 is so quiet, it seems to be dead. In '51, head carpenter Dave Horvath is up and working early, putting away neon tubes into a porter's lock-up. As we merrily bounce along, he reminds me that we have crossed into Central Time.

I deny hunger for a time, standing in the '49-'48 vestibule. In St. Jacob, Illinois, the morning mist is clearing, and Highway 40 parallels us on the right. What do people think when they see our Circus Train rolling by? Do they think it's just a publicity gimmick? Or do they realize that it's actually our home?

We duck under the overpass of another road, Highway 4, at Milepost 216.05, leaving parallel Highway 40 as it veers off slightly to the right and away from Conrail, and I resume my trip toward the Pie Car. In the '47-'46 vestibule, buffer plates squeak in protest as the coaches bounce over a rough spot, and the walk through 46-Car brings back a fond memory.

Two years ago, on "The Unicorn Show" (115th Edition), I was a Circus Train-crew porter. This car, then numbered RBX 47 (former Seaboard Airline Railroad car #50, named "Bay Pines," purchased by RBBB from the original Auto Train Corporation with deep, blue wall carpeting the length of the hallway), was home to the animal handlers--and a pet kitten named Maniac. When I'd sweep and mop; Maniac would chase the mop strings down the corridor. As I would prepare to leave, the crazy animal would hop up onto the wall's blue carpet and claw its way to the ceiling where it would hang, staring at me and meowing loudly. Everyone witness to this amazing feat would laugh.

Well, almost everyone.

One day, Maniac put on his little show for the Circus Trainmaster trainmaster. "Pets are no longer allowed in the train's walk-through section" was the written bulletin posted the following day. My disappointment is accented as my arms rub against the scratchy, blue wall carpet. (That order was later rescinded, thankfully--especially for Maniac!)

All the cars are quiet this morning, and Workman's car RBX 43, its interior virtually identical to the layout of RBX 55, is unbelievably still. This car usually jumps with loud partying, but not this morning. Several vacant bunks here reveal we are short-handed, a condition usually remedied by the time we get to California by August.

With all this walking back and forth between my car and the Pie Car, you'd probably think I'm too lazy to cook my own meals in the community microwave on '55. You'd be right. Before entering the Pie Car, I take one last look around from the '43-'42 vestibule. This part of Conrail once had double track, and the empty roadbed on our right is where this train rolled two years ago (in June, 1985) west-bound from Philadelphia, except we only went as far as Oklahoma City that time. And I enter the Pie Car.

I like a breakfast that fills my stomach and wakes me up, and this is exactly what I get! While I eat the works, we hear the radio monitor alive with train-crew talk. It is 7:15 a.m., and Tim Holan has received word that the water stop tracks ahead are occupied. Burlington Northern Railroad's Lindenwood Yard in St. Louis is chosen as an alternate site. I look out the window as we round a curve to our left, just past a suburb called Lumaghi Heights, to see a huge silvery ring in the distance, towering above the trees about ten miles ahead. It's the St. Louis Gateway Arch.

Once again the radio monitor squawks: the water stop is again set to the Conrail's small, three-track yard just ahead. (Changes like this, as well as most of the stops, are often as frustratingly mystifying to us as any rail fan on a train-chase without a scanner.) The radio now comes to life with other voices, bosses up and down the train spreading the word to wake up the crew for working the water stop.

Arriving in Exermont (East St. Louis), we cross HN Junction (Conrail's diamond rail-rail crossing with the Alton & Southern Railroad, with CSX's parallel rail line from the east along side us now), stopping alongside a piggyback yard at Kingshighway Rd. while a switch behind us is lined into the small Conrail yard which we just passed. We slowly make a reverse move over the junction, being shoved into Track 3 beside a dirt access road. Cuts of freight cars, filling two parallel tracks between us and the mainline, effectively hide us from view as our train begins to be serviced. Pre-

arranged contacts made by the show's head office back east in Vienna, Virginia have been set up for every event during the jump, and a large tank-truck full of water pulls up to fill the depleted H2O tanks under the coaches. A septic truck also pulls up as porters begin supervising the off-loading of waste.

Animal handlers emerge from RBX 46, quickly making their way forward to the stock cars. A truckload of hay has been waiting for us, and the crew begins tossing bales into the four stock cars as other circus personnel begin stepping down from their cars. Train mechanics make running inspections for defects that may have been acquired en route. One lubricates a bearing; another inspects a truck frame. A showgirl lies on a lawn chair, and a foreign acrobat exercises. All along the Circus Train, people take advantage of the layover to play, relax, exercise, tan and socialize. The more adventurous ones go out in search of groceries.

Local Illinois street P64 crosses the track a half-mile behind us at the village of Excermont, and I leave the railroad yard to find a store that sells a cool drink, something other than "the same old stuff" in the Pie Car. Walking with the 117th Edition's ringmaster, Eric Michael Gillette, we pass other Circus folk along the way. Eric, an actual gourmet chef who hails from Los Angeles and is fond of preparing hot, spicy foods, is out to find a certain-size milk for the mini-refrigerator in his stateroom aboard the train. As many on the show, he prepares his own meals. He locates an appropriately-sized milk at a grocery store near the intersection of P64 and Collinsville Rd. (at State Park Place, Illinois), and with minor purchases of snack food of my own, we return to the train--with two bags of groceries as well. Pie Car manager Matt Hely, who is from St. Louis, is seen at another store buying it out of bread for the remainder of our 4-day trip to El Paso.



The silver-painted jeep helps by shoving the heavy cut of wagons up the runs, and aboard the train. Author's collection.

Upon our arrival back home, Eric goes inside, while I stay outdoors to play with two puppies belonging to Red Unit's band director, Keith Greene and his wife, who hail from Greensboro, North Carolina. They live in the train's "private" section, not accessible from the "walk-through" section where I live. After a while, I move toward the head end, passing a Frisbee game, and several porters making a trash run. (It's simply amazing how much garbage 350 people can generate in less than two days!) Up front, and on the

other side of the stock cars from the dirt access road, some of the animal handlers, some clad in bathing suits, are taking showers. They are using the water delivery truck's supply, soap cascading down their legs, while Holan stands on the access road watching and waiting, his lips pressed tightly together and foot tapping impatiently on the ground. He is not amused at their delay, but is patient enough (and understanding of our not having showers on the train) to wait. But only for a short time: "THE SHOW [TRAIN] MUST GO ON" is what appears to be going through Tim's mind, if one delves deeper into his practical stare.

A dozen lawn chairs are out, supporting a dozen sunbathers. Others sit under the shady trees and watch everyone else, including the many children aboard, as more vehicles make deliveries. At 11:30 a.m., the new railroad crew (Conrail or Terminal Railroad ["TRRA"] of St. Louis RR; I'm not certain) arrives and begins pre-checking and familiarizing themselves with any special orders. The dispatcher enquires of our departure time via radio, and Holan estimates "About twenty minutes ought to do it." Just then the septic truck returns, having been topped off earlier, and disappears toward the rear in a cloud of dust. Twenty minutes later, the dispatcher calls again, and is told "Another twenty minutes." Finally, we are ready, and the train is secured for movement. Personnel climb back aboard, wheel chocks are pulled, brakes are released and we zig-zag out of the yard at 12:45 p.m., again crossing HN Junction and rolling by the signal control tower there. I have been allowed by Holan and the railroad crew to ride in the second locomotive (Conrail #6557) from here to the interchange with

trip through the yard, we turn left and begin a rising stretch of track upward—the approach to Merchant's Bridge over the mighty Mississippi. The approach from the east begins elevating the rail line to a crest mid-way across the river, then descends a steep downgrade to a Wye Track junction (also elevated above city streets on the west bank of the river) with another rail line to/from the west. Our route is to be into the left leg of the Wye, and into the warehouse district toward downtown St. Louis.

The impressive, double-track Merchant's Bridge, a three-span Pennsylvania through truss railroad bridge over the Mississippi River between St. Louis and Venice, Illinois, was opened to railroad traffic after its completion in May 1890, and now carries TRRA trains (and those of several other railroads via shared track agreements) above the river's swirling, muddy waters 52 feet below. We roll at 10 mph out into the bridge, with the St. Louis skyline to our left and a confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers to our north—with many boats and barges of various types plying the waters beneath the massive structure. My vantage point from the cab of the second locomotive keeps me a mile ahead of the rear of our train, so that last circus flatcar is nowhere in sight even when I'm already across the river and into the warehouse district north of the city.

A northbound Illinois Central Gulf coal train passes under us on the Illinois side as the St. Louis skyline comes fully into view. There isn't a better vantage point across the majestic city with its great arch towering above the waterfront to our left, about two miles south. As the two Conrail locomotives hauling us reach the Missouri side of the river, we diverge to the left at the Wye junction, descending into the warehouse district. Looking back at the Circus Train stretched out behind me reveals every vestibule packed by most of our troupe, with many taking still and video photography of the sight. As the engines enter the warehouse area, disappearing behind buildings and over crossings, the rear of our train has not yet reached the bridge!

All through town, people here and along the waterfront, on streets and freeways, in cars, in buses, in trucks and on foot, all wave to us and look on with astonishment as we snake this way and that. I continue to film our 10 mph progress through town with short vignettes of movie footage including the riverboat tourism waterfront downtown and get some incredible underside footage of the Gateway Arch as we roll directly beneath the eastern edge of the large, steel structure, and through two, short man-made tunnels under the park area surrounding it. Just after, the line curves sharply to the right on a steel trestle, and into town.

Past the Cardinal's baseball stadium, we roll down a steep incline off the bridge to ground level, passing the Amtrak platform just as a Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT) Railroad Co. freight train, behind Kelly-green painted locomotives with diagonal yellow nose-stripes, approaches from the other direction, cutting off peoples' view of us from the station, but not before I hear one woman exclaim, "Oh, no!" I'll bet many railfans would empathize with her feeling.

We stop a mile further to change locomotives from Conrail to Burlington Northern Railroad and this is where I step down from the engines to return to my car back in the train, 11 cars back, with a Thank You to the head-end crew for the



The last Tunnel Car, RBX 28 (former U. P. baggage car 6322), is seen being loaded. Removed from the tour in mid-1989, it was sent to Venice, Florida Winter Quarters for recycling into the Red Unit's new Pie Car, and rejoined the show in Tampa, Florida on Christmas Day 1989.

Burlington Northern Railroad (over the Mississippi River and through downtown St. Louis), and have my Super-8mm sound movie camera in hand to record this part of the jump.

In another mile, we enter tracks of the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis. Then, our train snakes slowly through a portion of the busy Madison Yard, with red-painted TRRA switch engines shunting hundreds of freight cars into tracks all around us. After negotiating a slow, twisting

opportunity to ride the engine. The CR units soon pass us on their return to Illinois for further assignments, stopping briefly at the rear of our train to pick up their EOT device. Newly on the point are two Cascade green-painted BN locomotives: BN 8040 (an SD40-2-type), and BN 3044 (a GP40-2-type). Brake tests seem to last forever, as Circus people will say, but soon enough we move across town to BN's Lindenwood Yard. We stop there, and depart St. Louis at 4:00 p.m., cabooseless.

A long, steep grade leads up and out of town at BN's South East Junction. On our left, we parallel Interstate 44, and on our right the south edge of a residential neighborhood, Webster Groves. In one back yard, a lady sees us passing and grabs her kid, holding him up in the air at us while yelling, "Look—it's the Circus! LOOK!" The child appears to be both bewildered and excited at the same time. We crest the grade at speed with blowing dust choking me in the '57-'56 vestibule, hot air blowing on my face in the suddenly high temperature. Twice, within ten miles, we pass an apparent rail fan out chasing us, wearing a blue USS Constitution T-shirt.

Not far past St. Clair, Missouri, we buzz a house where two dogs on a porch react to the sound of the wheels clacking over rail joints. One runs in circles while the other howls. Interstate 44 parallels the BN line on the other side of the also parallel Union Pacific Railroad mainline, where we catch up to and pass a unit coal train of white hopper cars bearing the red lettering of Missouri Power. We leave I-44 and the U.P. at Pacific, Missouri with a wave to the coal drag's engine crew, and head off into the woods, El Paso-bound.

Trees are now a yellower shade of green, and as I make my way toward the Pie Car, I notice dark clouds are appearing on the horizon. Trips back and forth through the Circus Train can become tiresome, but I have little choice, since I've already eaten the chips and candy bar I bought earlier today in Exermont. In 53 Car, I bump into a wall of hot air where the air conditioning has stopped operating; doors to performers' rooms are open to allow at least some circulation, and I am actually sweating before I reach the other end of the car. I'm told the train electricians are on their way to affect repairs.

I stop in another vestibule for the scenic view, observing people at trackside who display the same waves and smiles seen during our show. I-44 pops up occasionally, paralleling us; motorists and truckers honk their horns, and faces from within a chartered bus plaster the windows, some snapping photos of us in the graying afternoon light. I hope their pictures aren't washed out by the flash reflecting back off the bus windows. All this attention makes one feel like a celebrity, the way people indicate enthusiasm for our position of prestige: riding the Circus Train. Heck, I'm just a Prop-Hand.

At 6:30 p.m., about seven miles south of Cuba, Missouri, we slow for a yellow-over-red signal, and enter a siding just past a church where a bingo game is taking place. People in the structure's doorway, and others just arriving, pause to see us and wave, as overhead now, gray clouds which have



Water stop in Savana, Illinois during 1988. Author's photo.

been coming in for half an hour, now completely block the sun. We stop at the next signal—red—as rain begins drizzling slowly at first, then showering the dusty coaches.

Most of us riding outside in the vestibules return inside sit in the Pie Car eating Mainline while listening to Ring Two Boss Kraig Sandal's radio scanner. There has been unusually heavy rain ahead, and a hi-rail vehicle is out scouting for any washouts and/or debris. Several cars ahead, a young girl in the Romanian teeterboard troupe has stepped down to pick flowers in the rain, and Head Porter Lisa Kosegi leaves the Pie Car to round her up and get her back on board, giving her a lecture about getting off during such an unscheduled stop.

More radio chatter: a flooding downpour has occurred ahead in St. James. The BN conductor riding the lead unit tells Holan we should be going in another ten minutes, after a short piggyback train proceeds by and ahead of us. It appears shortly and leaves us behind in the rain. We move ahead again just after 7:00 p. m., for the longest time at only 10 mph. Ample evidence of the downpour is seen in St. James, where several houses along the railroad seem to float, and areas of the neighborhood lawns appear to be almost under water. With the air suddenly chilly, I return inside the warmth of RBX 55 (having returned home during all of this, full of Mainline), and swing up into my berth to give my tired eyes a much-needed rest....

I awake at midnight as the sensation of train movement has ceased, stirring me to consciousness. It's far easier to sleep when the train is rolling. I go outside for a brief look around just as we begin to move—somewhere in a forest—quickly accelerating to a constant 45 mph, approaching Springfield, Missouri. Revolving, yellow alert lights atop the engines call for attention, flashing their warning for those at grade crossings or ahead on the track. We arrive in Springfield just before 1 a.m., where BN crews change out; we depart within minutes. As we traverse and clear the south end of the yard, an engineer in a switch engine on another track sees me standing in the '55-'56 vestibule's dim light, and waves. I wave back as he begins shoving a cut of freight cars into the yard. For a mile or so we continue at reduced speed, then highball to track speed. I return to my upper berth, quickly departing again into the world of Cir-

cus Dreams.

Day Three, Wednesday, June 17, 1987

It's 6:30 a.m., and I awaken as we bounce and sway over rail joints, approaching Tulsa, Oklahoma. With a stretch and a yawn, I'm sitting up with my feet dangling over the side of the bunk. The closest clothing is what I throw on, and slide down to the floor with a thud and tingling toes. In the next room, less than a minute is spent washing my hair in one of four porcelain sinks set before the large mirror, and two days of dirt drain down as gray-water upon the track. Using a trick learned two years ago, I step out onto the generator deck just outside the heavy sound-proof door, stooping in front of the roaring Caterpillar diesel generator, and in another minute instead of stiff and flat, my hair is dry and fluffy from the warm blower. I toss the shampoo bottle into my bunk and move ahead to my usual hangout in the '56-'57 vestibule.



The final shot of loading the flats. With work now finished flat cars are ready for switching. Author's collection.

Suburbs surround us at the south edge of Tulsa International Airport, we roll through the North Memorial Drive grade crossing as people wave from waiting automobiles. East Tulsa is the name plate on a BN signal control box as we take the left-hand main. Up front, the locomotives bite down hard in the #8-notch throttle position as BN lifts us upgrade, easily making the crest. We slowly roll through downtown around a long curve to the left, soon crossing the muddy, rain-swollen Arkansas River before entering Cherokee Yard where BN road crews change out, again, on the fly. Soon stopped alongside the classification yard, we remain here for 45 minutes as freight cars roll one after another into the bowl tracks beside us, speed retarders screeching on the cars' wheel-rims like a giant's fingernails scratching across a giant chalkboard. I watch this with railfan fascination for half an hour as car after car moves into the many tracks and—WHAM—becomes part of a new train being "built." Soon, however, it feels like breakfast-time again, and a box of cereal is grabbed from my bunk as I train-walk toward the rear.

Clown Joe Strange sits in the '55-'54 vestibule reading a comic book, oblivious to the yard activity and the roaring Caterpillar diesel generator just behind the door in RBX 55. Vestibules offer the most space for a scenic ride, and are often a haven in the early morning hours when one tires of staying inside his quarters. By the time I reach the '52-'51 vestibule, we have begun to move without even the slightest lurch, stopping a mile beyond to allow a 114-car north-bound BN freight train to enter the yard and clear off the

main. At 8:30 a.m., we depart Tulsa on single track, with Interstate-244 to our left.

We diverge left at the town of Supulpa, taking the southward line toward Fort Worth, Texas. After eating more than half the box of Fruit Loops, the soft yellow-green of the trees outside in bright sunlight beckon me to the '42-'41 vestibule, where I stand and enjoy the passing scenery. Gliding slowly through the town of Henryetta, we pass a small kindergarten near a grade crossing (Rt. 124, I think), where dozens of little faces line the structure's windows and twice as many little hands wave. The train crests a grade and accelerates to about 45 mph.

South of there are two consecutive signs in the woods that are less than a mile apart: North Fred and South Fred, but from on board, only trees are seen. Just around the left-hand curve from there is a dormant power plant with a rusty, weed-covered siding. Undulating grades make up most of the rail line now, and this neck of the woods is lime-green in appearance with the sun beaming ever brighter and hotter by the minute from a Rock Island "Ingram-blue," cloudless sky. Locusts are heard answering the call of the train's wheels clicking over rail joints.

North of Holdenville, someone is seen riding horseback down a country road. Oil pumps, slowly churning up black gold, begin to appear before us across the landscape. At milepost 517 is a long curve, and looking back along the train reveals the bi-level's lower tier doors are open, giving the tigers inside it some fresh air and a view.

On days like this when we're not responsible for making call for a show, most of us sleep in. This morning, I and at least two others do not. I'm train-walking home to return the box of cereal to my bunk, and in the '51-'52 vestibule sits South African trapeze-catcher Gavin Prins and concessionaire James "Red" Smith, who are carrying on a conversation about the train-run and about the RBBB 117th Edition that this train carries. I remain here talking with them until about 11 a.m. as we enter Holdenville, where BN crosses the MKT Railroad line, when another newly-awakened person enters the vestibule for a look around. Sleepy-eyed, 16 year-old trapeze flier Mark Anderson orients himself to the surroundings. I exit, return the cereal box to my "house" on '55, and move forward to the '55-'56 vestibule to watch Oklahoma roll by.

At 11:50 p.m., I'm back in the Pie Car again, socializing in the comfortable air conditioning. The radio monitor in the kitchen comes alive as the BN conductor up front is saying a "switcher ahead has about 25 cars to put away," and that they're on the main. Tim Holan is heard asking him to call the dispatcher to see if we can use the delay to water the animals. "We need about 45 minutes," Tim is heard saying. The conductor complies, and we slow to a stop just north of Ada, Oklahoma on a right-hand, banked curve. The time is five minutes before noon, and our flatcars are blocking the busy dual grade crossing where N. Monte Vista St. and E1530 Rd. intersect. I leave the red-painted, hard-backed seat in the Pie Car and move outside to the '42-'41 vestibule. With the train stopped on a tilt, it feels like walking in a listing ship.

After a minute there is a knock at the door. I open both end-doors to cars RBX 42 and RBX 41, but see no one inside either car. "Out here!" yells circus paymaster Ron Otis,

standing outside on the ballasted roadbed. (His car, RBX 37, behind here in the private section of the coaches, has no access to the Pie Car during train movement.) I open the vestibule door and raise the floor where the car's steps are underneath the platform on which I have been standing, and help him up. We talk for a short while out here, noticing Tina Gebel, who has a Russian wolfhound act in the show, standing in the '39-'38 vestibule with radio scanner in hand. Everyone with scanners listens intently now, as the daily water stop is chosen for farther still up the line, not to be here in Ada after all. At 12:05 p.m. the locomotive's air horn is being blown to warn any Circus personnel who may have stepped down, and air hisses through the train-line below us as the brakes are released for train movement. I joke to Ron, "Maybe it's hissed off." His suddenly empty stare silences me from any further such remarks.

Moving upgrade, we pass beneath a bridge under construction, to waves and cheers of highway crews. In town and on our left, a tall purple water tank proclaims the Ada Cougars live here. Yes, and the Ringling' Tigers are riding by. Covered hopper cars fill sidings of local cement companies; the local freight we heard being discussed earlier over the radio scanner rests in another track as our long string of coaches sway past. Soon, on the right, is the large Ideal Cement Company. A conveyor belt crosses high over the railroad, and parallels us on the left for several gradient miles until, at milepost 555, we reach the conveyor's origin—a large rock quarry at Lawrence, Oklahoma. We skirt the west edge of the massive pit and disappear into the brush.

Later, I'm enjoying the day's excessively sizzling heat from inside the Pie Car's air conditioning, when we slow down again and Holan's voice is heard on the radio telling horse boss Randy Evans, riding ahead in stock car RBX 32, on animal watch duty, to have whoever is riding up there with his feet hanging out to. "Get inside right away!" "Okay" says Randy, and we're soon back up to Circus speed—45 mph on BN's former "Frisco" Railroad line.

12:55 p.m. It's now hot enough outside to see wavy lines on the sides of the coaches, and we stop on a siding about 32 miles north of Madill. This quiet patch of grass and solitary Highway 1/12 is about to play host to our meeting with another northbound BN freight, 15 minutes away. Soon enough, a plume of diesel exhaust rises over the ridge ahead and another air horn is heard. A headlight peeks around the corner, and three 6-axle BN locomotives (Nos. 8070, 6814 and 7018) lead over a hundred cars slowly by, 41 cement cars right behind the engines apparently on their way to the Ideal Cement Company back at Ada.

Circus people grow quickly annoyed at so many stops and delays (this freight train meet-stop once again inspiring several workmen to utter the phrase "Silver Snail does it again"), myself in particular, as I like to feel MOVEMENT, even though this is a common occurrence. The freight passes, and we pull away onto single main track, quickly reaching a brisk 45-to-50 mph that lasts a good distance. Milepost 583 is a station sign reading Clark, although the only building in sight is at an aggregate company where a lone Cascade-green BN switch engine sits on a siding. Our rush is raising a huge cloud of choking-thick cement powder; I can bite down and feel cement particles crunching between my teeth!

Soon we pass the Burch-Angus ranch to our right, a stunning example of Oklahoma's farmland beauty. We slow for the town of Randolph, and speed up again a mile later at milepost 592. On the '41-'40 vestibule where I'm now standing, dancer Elizabeth Griffith appears from inside 40-Car to watch the scenery while sipping a cup of coffee. She remarks on the heat out here, then returns inside her car. (RBX 40 is the "Girls' Car" and the farthest toward this end of the train that one can walk through the coaches, hence my interest in being there, besides seeing a pretty face). I consider Elizabeth's remark as I peel the sticking, sweat-soaked T-shirt from my back and wipe my forehead. Soon in the Pie Car again, I listen to a radio discussion concerning the water stop. The conductor is telling Holan they'll halt the head end at Main Street in Madill, Oklahoma.



As soon as the tiger act is finished, the tigers arrive at the rail yard and are loaded on the bi-level car. Photo courtesy of Ft. Worth-Star Telegraph.

It's 1:55 p.m., and as we pull to a stop, almost the entire train's complement of 350 residents disembark, just like yesterday in Excermont, Illinois, to play, sight-see, shop, work, tan, etc. You know the drill by now. A Madill Volunteer Fire Dept. truck stands by for water service, its local crew staring at the elephants in the first two cars, the "nosey" creatures sticking out their long trunks from the sliding stock car doors of RBX 30 and RBX 31, which are immediately behind the engines. They are looking for their lunch. Crewmen begin filling tubs with water and are spreading out bales of hay; others inspect the train's cars once again. Train mechanic J.D. Kirchner lubricates roller bearings, while another train crewman checks for loose truck-frame keepers. Porters are unloading dozens of plastic bags of trash that have been placed into the vestibules by Circus coach residents, including a VERY large heap from the Pie Car. Meanwhile, an army of circus folk have invaded Frank's

Grocery, conveniently located right beside the grade crossing at Main Street, at the head end of the train. We apologize to the sole lady on duty there for catching her by surprise, but she replies that she is happy we stopped by and doesn't mind filling all the bags. I'll bet she made more money that hour than they'd made all week! Southern Pacific Railroad locomotive No. 6521, sub-lettered Pine Bluff, pulls into a siding with a 17-car, caboosless BN northbound, and its crew heads for the yard office after staring for a bit at our "Train of Wonders from Every Land." I speak briefly with railroad crewman D.K. Coleman, one of the head-end crew running us today over the Burlington Northern, describing to him what life aboard the Circus Train is like. Later, and after putting away my bag of groceries, I return to my spot in the '56-'57 vestibule as we depart Madill to the smiles and waves of new-found friends (Madill residents) Billie Billingsly and Donna Hartin made here during the past 45 minutes who came trackside, with others, to share what "Circus Day" really means to a small town.



The show bus rides the flats, way back behind the coaches. Passing the Conway Yard, about 2:30 p.m., June 15, 1987. Joe Jack photo, Author's collection.

South of Madill the scenery becomes increasingly greener, and at milepost 618 we round a curve to the right on a slow approach to the long fill and BN drawbridge over Lake Texoma. In contrast to the dusty yellow brush of today's ride so far south of Tulsa, rich, green shoreline surrounds the crystal blue water of the lake. We rumble at a moderate pace across a draw-span over the water, and a fisherman waves to us at Lakeside, Milepost 618.9 The next signal is yellow over red; the one after is green. We cruise along at Circus speed (averaging about 45 mph) over the flat terrain, catching glimpses of Lake Texoma to the right through the trees.

We're under the jurisdiction of a yellow signal at milepost 630, beginning a 30 mph right-hand curve over a creek where three people are net-fishing. They pay us only slight notice, concentrating on their task at hand (finding supper, one presumes), then at milepost 631 we cross over combined Highways 69/75, where our rail line joins tracks of the Missouri Pacific and MKT Railroads on a span carrying all three across the Red River, muddy and swollen, apparently from yesterday's heavy rainfall across the region. This is the Oklahoma-Texas state line, and the three rail lines split off just after the bridge, diverging their separate ways. Around the next BN curve, just inside the Lone Star State of Texas,

we stop at a red signal ("Red Board" in railroad terms) to wait 45 minutes for another northbound BN freight train. I disembark and walk ahead, conversing with BN crewman D.K. Coleman, who I briefly talked with in Madill at the water stop. The 75-car northbound passes, but the signal remains red, and we wait another 30 minutes for a 28-car piggyback train. This time, the light goes to green, and I quickly return to the '57-'56 vestibule—closest access back aboard the "Walk-Through" section of the train from the engines—just before we roll out.

Upgrade from here is Denison, Texas, where BN weaves, snake-like, through town. It is here we see our first "wig-wag" grade crossing signal this year, wig-wagging its upside-down warning like someone waving while standing on their head. Around a curve we roll at extremely reduced speed over the BN diamond rail-rail crossing with the MKT Railroad, uphill through a residential section, then down-grade again. Passing the Red River Hobby Shop on our right—just across S. Armstrong Ave. from the railroad—I'd like to jump out and visit. But that's not an option I'm

allowed to choose, so I sigh instead as we gain speed.

We enter Sherman, Texas, where a woman riding in the back seat of a car does a double-take at us as the car she is in pulls out of an apartment complex. The car is close enough that I can read her lips as she sees our train's red banners: "Oh, the

circus!" At Northside Fire Station, firemen pop outside, one of them waving at us like he's trying to put out a fire. At 6:35 p.m., we come upon another red signal and stop beside a small rail yard.

Anticipating another long wait, I fetch two empty milk crates from inside '55 and bring them to the '56-'57 vestibule to stack them as a make-shift seat. Cautiously testing my new perch for levelness on the steel deck's grating, I decide it's safe, and sit to wait out the delay. The stool I normally use is currently occupied by someone else in the '55-'56 vestibule, who has hung a radio in one corner of the exterior space, and placed a cooler of drinks he purchased back in Madill in the other corner.

6:45 p.m. We bump ahead for one car-length and stop again. I elect to return to '55-Car to see if someone's radio scanner is on, hoping to find out what's going on. A television broadcast is heard sending out an emergency alert for Josten City: "A severe thunderstorm watch in effect until 7:30..." the weatherman is heard saying. Suddenly, train electrician Jon Bell, who has been playing video games with another crewman in his room, bolts down the hallway toward the rear, his radio squawking a mile a minute. Aha—some action to break the monotony! It would seem that local kids are snooping around the bi-level flatcar, where the tiger doors remain open in deference to the heat. Stepping outside for a look reveals nothing, as the rear of our train is nearly a mile back along this tangent stretch of track, and

the yellow-orange glare of the setting sun reflects into my eyes as a blinding light off the coaches. On the other side, toward the east, ominous black clouds pass in the near-distance.

Ahead a few cars, on his vestibule of Car RBX 59 (former Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe RR sleeper #910 named "Indian Scout"), the show's General Manager, Robert MacDougall listens to developments of this newest incident on his radio scanner, wearing a scowl that says just keep those kids away. (Circus animals are NOT tame, but are only trained, a fact that makes us understandably nervous when someone gets too close.)

Minutes later, Bell's voice is heard on the radio. "...kids were just looking at the train." A likely, but edgy story, I think, recalling the incident with an inebriated transient who trespassed on the railroad property a year ago in Springfield, Illinois, and lost a finger or two when a seemingly harmless big cat became annoyed. Poor fellow, probably thought he'd just pet the "pretty little kitties." Yes, our concern is genuine both for the safety of the public, and for our many exotic animals.

At 7:04 p.m. we get a green light after Southern Pacific Railroad locomotive #4801, sub-lettered Houston, leads 11 cars into the yard beside us. At 7:05, and after a radio check to be certain everyone's aboard, we inch forward into downtown Sherman, Texas. Missouri Pacific Railroad employees watch as we cross their rails beside the interlocking tower, and behind six tank cars of vegetable oil sits Cotton Belt railroad switch engine #2584, shut down and oblivious to this mile long, silver stranger invading its territory. Moonlight Lady pays no attention as she creeps slowly through town.

Waiting motorists, and pedestrians, wave and cheer. Two men working beside the track smile up at us from beneath several layers of industrial grime covering their faces, as our train rocks to and fro past them on the rough, jointed rail. At South Sherman Y we leave CTC (Centralized Traffic Control) and accelerate to 25 mph, now on smooth-riding ribbon rail. Storm clouds have passed, leaving a chill in the air, and I go inside '55 for a sweater.

Soon after, again on my double-stacked milk-crate seat in the '56-'57 vestibule, I watch the rolling scenery of north Texas as we crest a long upgrade beside grain elevators at Dorchester, then start downhill again. Mileposts 659 and 659.3 are bridges over which we traverse small creeks with yawns of sound. Farther ahead on a left-hand curve, the coaches bounce over Savage Road (a dirt road) crossing, each succeeding car jumping just a bit over the road, one obedient car following the other in the fading daylight and rising cloud of dust. Our speed remains a constant 50 mph, now beginning a tangent which I gather exceeds 30 miles without a curve. Farmland is all around, with hills and parallel highway 289 to our left. The town of Gunter, Texas is about 3 miles beyond that last left-hand curve, similar in name to our star animal trainer, Gunther Gebel-Williams.

Our passing through the town of Celina brings families running out of doors, each wearing a grin as big as Texas. At a trackside convenience store, people look up from gas pumps, from behind the cash register and in front of magazine racks as Moonlight Lady graces the adjacent grade crossing. On foot, on bike and in auto, children of all ages react with jubilant surprise as The Greatest Show On Earth,

for one brief minute, is in their home town! Past Celina, farm animals graze in broad pastures which give a wide view of the area toward the setting sun, now at horizon level, casting an orange sherbet glow skyward which reflects brightly off the coach sides.

At Frisco, Texas two teens in a tan van waiting at the W. Main Street grade crossing hop out onto the road and wave, while a third teen beeps the vehicle's horn. Two miles later, we slow to cross two, short wooden trestles just south of the Dallas Parkway, then accelerate. Upon entering Carrollton, we slip under Santa Fe Railway's line to Dallas and begin passing through a housing development full of identical homes as far as one can see in all directions. A stop signal halts our progress at the development's south edge. While we sit and wait for the go-ahead, scores of area residents congregate about the train to conduct their own personal inspections. Meanwhile, twilight becomes darkness as we talk to many of the locals, having stepped down from our "Mile-Long Mobile-Home."

Finally, with two warning blasts of the lead engine's air horn, we re-board and are on our way again, El Paso-bound. Sitting in a siding around a curve on our left is locomotive BN 8038 (an SD40-2), with a 9-car northbound: Burlington Northern business car "Meramec River" and eight piggy-back flats. No caboose. Around another curve is a major intersection with several city streets, two other railroads crossing at grade, and the I-77 overpass. Under the bridge, our train's bright security spot lights reflect off the many round, concrete supports, shadows dancing playfully around and about the train like happy ghosts haunting a carnival fun-house.



The author is seen inside his 1987 home, RBX 55, marking down the circus train's jump-route so far, in his *Rand McNally U. S. Railroad Atlas*.

Of all the crazy things to see here! Chessie System bay-window caboose, B&O 903700 (the "B&O" marked through with silver duct tape), sits alone on a siding behind a warehouse, a long way from its Eastern home. Backs of buildings are brightly lit by our security spot lights, and people step out of the many rear doors to watch us pass in the gathering night; they turn to yell inside those buildings, and others quickly run outside as well to see the Circus Train.

On our left, a large open space at Gribble, Texas offers a clear view of the Dallas skyline, while in the sky to our right are occasional flashes of lightning in the direction of Ft. Worth, where we are to be interchanged tonight to Union

Pacific Railroad. We've been rolling along at 20 mph for the last ten or so miles, and the time has slipped by fast. For some, it's wind-down time. For others, it's party time! Video-tape movie viewing, card games, reading of books or newspapers, conversation or late-night vestibule riding are all part of the norm ... or perhaps a late meal.

In the '56-'57 vestibule, I share the peace and quiet with several rowdy (partying) New York City-area break-dancers, in awe of their first tour with the show. In another vestibule, a couple stands arm in arm, starrng romantically at the Dallas skyline while a child begs for a boost to see above the bottom Dutch door. Inside, many tired personnel are beginning to turn in, as yet another circus day draws to a close. Asked for the time, break-dancer Anthony Ortiz replies, "It's only 10:05." ONLY?! I quietly leave. In my bunk, I discover many books and papers have fallen from the shelf above my bed since we departed Madill, Oklahoma. I simply shove the entire mass into one corner of the berth (an incredibly tight fit), then swing up and lie down. Only one more day of traveling is left before Moonlight Lady delivers The Greatest Show On Earth to the waiting children of El Paso. Turning off the light, I say a prayer for safe travel, and in a few minutes that familiar and welcome bouncy sway of the moving Circus Train sends me drifting into dreamland....



The interior of the 117th Edition Pie Car is shown with personnel enjoying one another's company. The author is seen standing. Billie Billingsly photo, Author's collection.

Day Four, Thursday, June 18, 1987

It's 6:30 a.m., and I find myself awake, yawning and stretching to the rustling of crunched papers and books around my feet from last night's instant cleanup. Objects from the hidden shelf above and to my right are falling onto my chest and legs, including clothing in formerly neat stacks above me. The car is rocking wildly over rough track, and after sliding down to the floor I find it difficult to stand upright. I dress and exit to the '55-'56 vestibule.

The sky above is one huge blue-gray cloud, with bursts of thunder and lightning every few moments. A sign on an old Texas & Pacific Railroad station reads Abilene. We are in that Texas town's downtown, where the clacking of the train's wheels over rail joints echo loudly off adjacent buildings. It's warm and dry, but in another ten minutes rain begins to fall. I return inside '55 to straighten my messy

bunk. Putting my house in order, I notice water droplets gliding lazily across the window outside. Another minute goes by, and they become a steady plop against the Plexiglas, making it appear as if the train is crying over the wear and tear of our rollicking ride over ever rougher jointed rail. This time of morning the rain and rail joints are the only external sounds; the interior rumble and creaking of the moving railroad car completes the audio effect.

The two neon lights in the berth section of the car are off, making the hallway dark; the other 21 residents of RBX 55 remain asleep. The only movement, aside from the shifting floor which bobs with the car-body over the rough track, is the gray, plastic curtains in front of each berth, and lighting fixture cords—all swaying in unison to the rhythm of the rails. A silent consultation with Rand McNally tells me that Abilene is 454 rail miles east of El Paso, a full day's journey by Circus Train.

Moving forward to the '56-'57 vestibule, I dry off the rain-covered stool and sit on the side that's away from the falling rain, remaining here for half an hour with an occasional look back along the swaying coaches. (I'm happy to have the stool again instead of the milk crates I sat on yesterday: it's more comfortable!) The terrain here is similar to that of Oklahoma, but much sandier. Near "Noodle Dome," we come upon a yellow signal, then at Trent, Texas population 313 (denoted by a sign beside parallel I-20) we stop at a red signal, which almost immediately turns to yellow. We now proceed at the break-neck speed of ten whole miles per hour. West of Trent we accelerate to about 45 mph, and the roughness of the track makes me wish we were still going ten!

Ahead, two Armour yellow-painted Union Pacific locomotives are hauling us today, visible on curves where the Texas bush doesn't obstruct the view. It's on one of the longer curves I look back and see we are still caboose-less. Santa Fe's rail line to Lubbock parallels us for a while on the left before we roll under it. Just past the overhead railroad bridge, we pass a stopped U.P. eastbound freight train, with three Armour Yellow Missouri Pacific units on the point—waiting for us to get by on the single-track mainline. They will proceed out of the siding after the rear of our train passes the switch ahead of them. A reduced speed pass through the town of Sweetwater shows people are up in time to see us and wave. We creep up and crest the grade west of town, when hunger begins creeping up on me. It's 8:30 a.m., we're 60 miles east of today's pre-planned water stop location (Big Spring, Texas), and I begin the journey back through the train toward the Pie Car, stopping in nearly every vestibule on the way for a scenic look around. I don't like to miss anything.

Passing Roscoe, Texas, a lone Roscoe, Snyder & Pacific Railroad switch engine shunts cars at a small industry near the former Texas & Pacific mainline which we are traversing. The terrain here is so flat, one can see almost to infinity. But this Texas flatland is no desert, for farms, looking like gigantic gardens of ripe, green crops, are everywhere! The only breaks in the countless acres of greenery are the railroad, highways, telephone pole lines, or small stands of

trees around a distant farmhouse here and there, dotting the landscape like mirages on a desert. Ahead on the horizon is a thin patch of skylight at the end of the cloud-cover tunnel: another Circus Day is dawning. With our speed up to about 50 mph now, I'm becoming accustomed to the greater-than-normal rocking over rough-riding jointed rail.

Continuing toward the Pie Car, I note the interiors of the cars, their scratch-built, standard-size sleeper rooms comfortably harboring the populace of the show's 117th Edition. In '50-Car is the smell of dirty dishes left in someone's sink. The hallway lights are out in '48, and in '46 the atmosphere is comprised of the musty odor of damp towels hanging in the hallway. An empty soda can, forgotten on top of a fire extinguisher cabinet, jiggles in vibration with the car, and several cigarette butts occupy one corner of the '46-'45 vestibule. These will all disappear, however, upon our arrival in El Paso as job security for the porter crew. Painted walls of pinks, yellows, or pale blues and greens are a marker as to which car I'm in.

Ron Otis, the 117th Edition paymaster, stands in the vestibule between RBX 41 and RBX 42. Author's collection.

Flatland outside metamorphasizes into rolling farmland, while up front, faint brown fumes of diesel exhaust puff lightly back over the coaches. Sharing the view with a lively radio in his lap, Prop-hand Kary Combs sits on a stool in the '44-'43 vestibule, nodding a good morning as I walk by. With my body still in "Wake-Up" mode and my ears ringing from the loudness of the train's wheels smacking loudly over every rail joint, my mind practically screams as I pass through RBX 43's roaring generator room. It's 8:30 a.m., and as I enter the Pie Car, 43 -Car's loud generator momentarily diverts the cook's attention as I open the door. He wants to see who's coming in for breakfast. In the tight corridor leading from the vestibule down to the counter, muddy footprints attest to all the rain we've seen, while in the kitchen, the train's movement causes eggs slosh across the grill. I'm eating cereal at one of the white-topped tables when sunlight bursts out from behind the clouds, beaming through the windows. On our right, I-20 parallels the railroad again, and a sign along the road reads Big Spring 27 Miles. That's about another half hour. After breakfast, I return a quarter mile forward to my usual hangout in the '56-'57.

The smell of fuel oil permeates the air as we pass, slowing down, through a large refinery just east of Big Spring, and ahead on the right is the Hubbard Packing Company, where cattle moo at the train. Oh a whim, I moo back; all of the cows stop and look up at me, then after a beat, begin mooing again. Yes, the circus is in town.

Moonlight Lady stops at the depot at 9:45 a.m., where show crews repeat the never-ending task of feeding and watering our hungry, non-human passengers. Other animal care personnel hoof it to the rear to feed and water the big cats. After a look around town, and a cup of coffee in the

Main Street Café at 10:15, I return to the rail yard as the crews are finishing up. (Show employees have been known to miss the train at water stops, having to find their way to the next stand the best way they can.) The last bale of hay is loaded, and the last of the zoo-doo is mucked out, to the delight of townsfolk out this morning to see the unique event. A large contingent of school children have been brought down to see us as well, each of them squealing with excitement and delight at everything to do with the Circus, the exotic animals, and the train. The adults in the crowd, including Union Pacific employees standing at the depot, reflect their own child-like wonder as they, too, look on with fascinated wonder.

With the Red Unit once more secure and ready to roll El Paso-bound, there come two blasts of the air horn, and air hisses through the train's air line. What little slack there is in the tight-lock couplers runs out about a foot as the last passenger climbs aboard, and the two units, Union Pacific SD40-2's #3659 and #3131 begin to drag us out of town. I close the '57-'56 vestibule door and resume my perch upon the stool. It's 10:30 a.m. when we depart this place, forever etching fond memories in the minds of those who witnessed our short visit.

Not far beyond the yard, while crawling at 10 mph, we pass a huge pile of wrecked freight cars, the tangled steel twisted into frightful, useless shapes. The scene is chilling, and I mouth a silent prayer it never happens to us. It must have rained here considerably last night, for high water is on our right for more than a mile, almost up to the crossties, with telephone poles half-submerged in the adjacent, low ditch. After passing the flood zone, we speed up as I-20 parallels us again on the right.

Riding steadily, we descend a long grade, and then ascend just past a sign along I-20 which reads: "Stanton, Texas. Home of 3,000 friendly people—and a few soreheads." Slowing for the town limits, I look back down the Interstate highway to see the affectionately nick-named Blue Whale, a church bus purchased by several Ringling Bros.' employees during our March stand in Hampton, Virginia for use as personal transportation and recreation. They drive it overland from town to town, as do others who own personal vehicles, instead of riding the train. Some have actually flown home for the four days we've been riding the train, on a mini-vacation as it were, and will be in El Paso by tomorrow in time for the opening show.

The Blue Whale bus has caught up with the train, and passes us as the railroad and interstate veer away from each other. After cresting the grade in Stanton, the terrain is flat once again, now with oil pumps dotting the landscape, slowing churning away like giant, steel blue and black grasshoppers digging at the ground. Midland, Texas is visible 18 miles ahead, distinguished from the land by its high-rise office towers. On approach to the city, we slow to 20 mph, entering downtown about noon.



A large billboard advertising nightly reruns of Star Trek sits off to the right. That series is a favorite among many RBBB Circus personnel, due mainly to the multi-ethnic nature of the circus cast and crew, just like the multi-ethnic crew of the Starship Enterprise. Circus folk already live that life-style existence! To us, it's just natural. It's also an appropriate note, seeing the billboard, to note that El Paso--our destination this jump--is the home-town of Star Trek's creator, Gene Roddenberry. Our concessions manager, Richard Slayton, like myself, is an avid Trek fan, and is looking forward to seeing the premier of a new Roddenberry television series: Star Trek: The Next Generation, which is set to begin airing this year on September 26 during our show's stand in Salt Lake City.

Television reception aboard the Circus Train is difficult, but not impossible during train-runs, owing to the metallic steel shell of the coaches interfering with broadcasts, among other reasons. Interestingly, the saucer-shaped RCA antennas atop the coaches must be removed for low clearances during train-runs, such as when the train operates over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor and through New York City's Penn Station, as they could be too close to the overhead centenary wires which provide electrical power to Amtrak locomotives on that rail line (Amtrak uses electrically-powered locomotives between Washington DC and points north of New York City).

The next 20 miles west to Odessa, Texas allows a 45 mph pace, with parallel Highway 80 the entire stretch. Countless drivers, some who pace alongside us at our speed, witness our trek to their left and to our right. The Midland and Odessa skylines are actually within sight of each other across the incredibly flat terrain. West of Odessa, I-20 is alongside us again, this time on our left, and a sign is seen which reads: El Paso, 268 Miles, answering the most prevalent question on everyone's mind. Across the continuous patches of green shrubbery that stretch across the plain are oil pumps, and literally thousands of telephone poles carrying wires in all directions like a massive, black steel spider web suspended above the ground. Both city skylines remain in a bluish hue for miles after, gradually becoming fading dreams in the distant haze behind us.

We round the first curve I've noticed since before Stanton, then dip under I-20 and curve to the right on a long, descending grade. Orange-painted knobs near the undercorners of the coaches are sticking out, revealing the engineer's brake application. We settle to the bottom of the grade, and I'm beginning to feel accustomed to the wild rocking we are still experiencing over the rough track. Vestibules up and down the entire passenger section of the Circus Train are now filled with show personnel seeing the land and waving to thousands of pleasantly surprised motorists on parallel I-20, to our left. Above, several clouds are scattered about in the hot, sky-blue heavens, hanging on a thought; their huge, dull shadows sliding across the landscape like some great, slow bird searching for a resting place. Like the Circus, roaming. I go inside RBX 55.

Several workmen crowd the door to one roomette watching a TV show through static interference, while another naps in his bunk with the berth's curtain half open. Others play cards, read books, or cook light meals in the '55 community microwave oven. There's always activity during a

train-run, especially on the longer jumps between playdates, and if we can't find something to do, then we'll make something to do. I have to step over and around people, chairs and other objects in the hallway before reaching my berth where I swing up and open the cabinet door to see what I have to eat in the grocery bag from yesterday's water stop in Madill. Three potted meat sandwiches are not enough to satisfy my hunger, but since I'm too fatigued to make another, I put the stuff away.

My position in this upper berth gives an overview down the hallway toward the "high" (RBX 56) end of 55-Car. Across from me is the mini-kitchen which we use when we don't want to eat in the Pie Car, the small area at this end of the bunk section being situated above two, small refrigerators used by the show's train and transportation maintenance crew who also live on this car. Porter/Carpenter Bobby Moomey is bent over to pull a drink from one fridge, when the door to the donniker (lavatory area) flies open, smacking his rear. "Oh, sorry," says ring curb crewman Kenny Bennett, on his way back to his roomette. As Bobby regains his footing, Kenny squeezes past, suggesting, "Bad place to stand, bud."



Final shot of loading the flats. With work now finished, the flat cars are ready for switching. Author's collection.

I check out the scenery from outside in the '55-'56 for a while and witness the incredible sight of literally thousands of oil pumps stretched out to the horizon and beyond; however, only one in ten are pumping. Just past the Rattlesnake Bomber Base, the Blue Whale bus catches up again, having stopped (we later learn) for food and fuel. They pace us at 35 mph for several miles, then pull ahead, leaving us behind in the dust, but not before one of the show managers, astounded that the rickety vehicle made it this far across the nation, comments over the radio: "By God, those crazy #@!\$%^'s made it!"

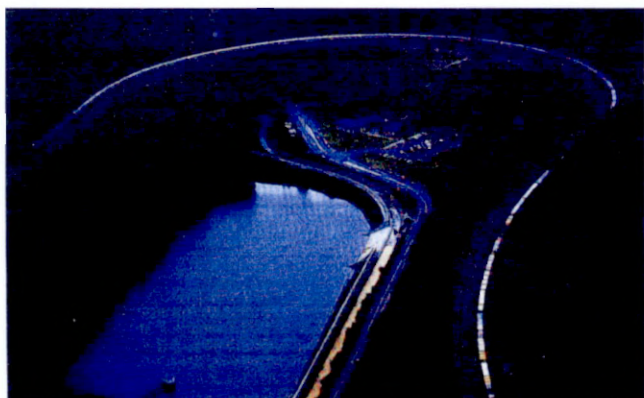
One of those on the bus, Wardrobe Crewman Mike Hickey, who would eventually become Red Unit's Trainmaster upon Tim Holan's retirement in the early 2000's, would later comment to me that he thought they would beat the train to El Paso--which they actually would--and that they were surprised to see us during the trip at all.

Just after our 2 p.m. pass through Barstow, Texas, the view is redundant enough to put me to sleep, so I wander off to my berth, where I close my eyes and wander off to la-land.

At 3:45 p.m., I wake up from a nice, short nap as we pass track gangs working in Slow-Order territory (our progress

through here is about 10-to-20 mph). I've missed the U.P. crew change in Toyah, Texas, but now that I'm awake again, I feel the intense, arid dryness outside. Combined with our slow pace through the work zone Slow-Order, the heat makes this part of the trip almost miserable, and feeling my cheeks to wipe sweat off my face makes me aware of a non-regulation growth of beard stubble. The water tanks under the coaches don't hold enough water for 350 people to use for that purpose during train-runs; I continue wiping drops of sweat from my forehead as we roll slowly by the railroad track maintenance crews.

Ahead, the engineer on the lead locomotive tosses out railroad-issue jugs of cool water down to the laborers, and as soon as the rear of our train passes their work zone, we speed up again to about 45 mph around some hills where a scared rabbit is seen dashing behind its presumed protective cover of a bush. In a few miles, we stop, and then start again, having some sort of engine trouble. Going upgrade now, coupler slack is felt jostling in and out a bit as the locomotives, for whatever the reason, falter and lose traction. The jerks are subtle, yet clearly noticeable. A Union Pacific engine crewman is seen walking back down the lead unit's side platform, where he opens an access doorway and disappears into the motor housing through an access doorway.



The Horseshoe Curve as seen from helicopter. Moonlight Lady rounds the bend. Photo courtesy Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

It's 3:50 p.m., and after a quick shave and wash of my face and hands, I am once again presentable, and am standing in my hangout in the '56-'57. Looking toward the head-end, I notice the lead unit is no longer working (!), and the second unit is doing all the work up a steep grade. It's no good, however, and at 5:20 p.m. Moonlight Lady comes to a halt on the single track mainline, stalled in the desert and dead in her tracks. This could be disastrous! The prompt arrival of the show-train in each town is critical to the Big Show making its scheduled opening. (El Paso's opening show is scheduled for tomorrow at 7:30 p.m.) Hopefully, the delay won't be long. (What none of us will know until later, and after being told later this year by people in California, is that this delay will make national television news headlines. My honest question to that: Who tells the news stations about these things?)

Only once since I joined the show have they ever even talked about cancelling a show, earlier this year when near blizzard conditions threatened to cut our final Saturday

night performance in Charleston, West Virginia. The next engagement was New York City, and that Madison Square Garden opening show-date was to be on a Tuesday afternoon! The train would roll Sunday through the wee hours of Tuesday morning for that jump, with me filming some of the trip with my Super-8mm Sound movie camera. The weather played havoc with load-out, as frozen snow was removed from the flatcars more than once, and we left Charleston 12 hours late, but we certainly made excellent time after we accessed Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, opening on schedule that week, and we were one tired crew after the conclusion of that opening show! As far as RBBB performances actually being cancelled, only a serious incident such as a serious derailment, or a national rail labor strike, could bring such a scenario. During one rail labor strike during the 1990s, the show would miss an engagement, but RBBB personnel made national news headlines once again to protest their delay: a Red Unit clown in full costume and makeup was shown on television, comically kicking the wheels of his railcar home for TV cameras. Who says we don't have a sense of humor, even in the midst of dire circumstances? We do! That ideal, that notion of not taking ourselves too seriously, gets us through the day-to-day grind.

With U.P. crews effecting repairs while in transit, I retire to the Pie Car to find tonight's Mainline is burritos. "Yuck," I say, and order fried chicken before remembering that, for safety reasons, they don't use the fryer during train-runs. Lowell Downer, on Pie Car cook duty again, reminds me with an impatient, but humorous, grin. He's teasing, but he's being serious, too. After ordering everything on the menu board they are out of or simply don't have, I settle for salad, milk and a hamburger. Comments from several people about being "cooped up for too long" are overheard as I chow down like a hog, and on the radio we hear that another locomotive is being sent out from the west to pick us up. I pass the time reading a recent issue of Trains Magazine, getting more than one nasty comment for that from those tired of being stuck on board the train. I finally leave the Pie Car at 6:35 p.m.

Sitting still on a curve in the middle of nowhere, actually, not far west of Kent, Texas, Moonlight Lady makes a curious sight to passing motorists on I-10 a quarter of a mile south of our position. (I-20 had since merged into I-10 about eleven miles east of Kent, but not within sight of the railroad.) As others have been doing since we stopped, I step down to the ground, off the train to explore the immediate surroundings. Wardrobe crewman Michael DeBarros tosses a rock at a bush, to the reward of hearing a rattlesnake warn him off; we quickly back up toward the train.

A slight breeze offers some relief from the heat, blowing bushes and twigs in a silent dance. Many of us wander about, some careless of what hidden dangers might be crawling around out here, including snakes and scorpions. I've walked ahead along the roadbed to a point about midway in the train where a high, steep embankment leads down from the right-of-way. I slide gingerly to the bottom to join other circus folk who are already down there, but soon become bored with walking around aimlessly--deciding to stroll ahead to the engines, curious as to the long delay. To have an answer to a question, one must first ask it.

An engine crewman informs me that "the lead unit [Union Pacific #3659] kicked a crankcase protective device ten miles back, and the second unit is unable to lift us upgrade by itself." We have stopped at [this former Texas & Pacific Railroad] Milepost 695.5. The rescue "train," lone U.P. SD40-2-type locomotive #3140, comes over the hill ahead and around the curve, and couples up. It's 6:45 p.m., and I begin walking back to the '57-'56 as U.P. crews join the units. Another of the overland drivers, the Circus bus driver, Steve Williams, (driving the Pie Car van across the country as there wasn't enough room for it on the flatcars this time), pulls up alongside us on an access road to see what's up. He will pace us until Sierra Blanca, Texas.



The Red unit, looking toward the rear not far west of Van Horn, Texas at sunset. The flat cars toward the rear. Bill V. Atkins photo, Author's collection.

Moonlight Lady rolls again at 6:55, easily cresting the grade, then picking up speed to 50 mph downhill. A crewman remarks to me about the landscape: "Texas gives you the feeling you're part of something big!" I concur, and he returns inside the car. I continually move from one side of the vestibule to the other and back again, on each succeeding curve, to watch the long line of silver-gray Circus cars curving around behind me; I'm still not yet used to there being no caboose on the rear, though. I know—old habits die hard.

The bottom of the hill begins a long, 20-mile or so stretch of tangent across a flat basin until we make a slow pass through Van Horn, Texas, to the smiles and waves of townsfolk, and passengers on a chartered bus making a stop here. We ascend west out of town into a small mountain range toward Crusher, Texas, and I-10 veers away after a sign is seen that reads El Paso, 199. We're counting down.

The sun is setting with a peach color today, and clouds behind us are that same color on top, and a grayish-purple below, against the darkening eastern horizon. The end of

the long, steep upgrade beyond Crusher is the beginning of another long, flat stretch of tangent track, shooting westward across the desert. Staring off into the distance southward, I see an eastbound Sunset Limited passenger train, far off across the valley on the Southern Pacific Railroad's mainline, heading toward New Orleans. From this extreme distance, the Amtrak train looks like a sewing needle sliding across a mole hill, and I can just make out its length: two Amtrak engines leading a single-level baggage car and about 11 double-decker Superliner passenger cars.

Interstate-10 is beside us again, and at Interstate Highway milepost 111 a coyote prances across the pavement, away from the track and the noise of the Circus Train. Before us now is a seemingly endless row of green signals as far as one can see up the line, each about two miles apart, indicating a clear track ahead, and the engineer keeps up a steady 50 mph on the bumpy, jointed rail. Coming into Sierra Blanca, Union Pacific jointed rail becomes Southern Pacific ribbon rail as we enter the same line that the eastbound Sunset Limited, seen a short time ago, traversed on its trip from Los Angeles—where we'll perform in little more than a month's time.

The ride is remarkably smoother as we take a siding and stop to allow an eastbound double-stack container train, being pulled by ten engines, to pass. It crawls by us in the twilight, while the sun, now hidden behind the mountains ahead, casts sweeping pinks and blues on the clouds hanging in the sky like high pillars of cotton. We soon get a green signal and move out onto the main track, and I return inside the comfort of RBX 55. Sleep is made easy by the now-gentle, ribbon-rail ride.

I awaken several hours later and immediately trace our route so far in my Rand McNally railroad atlas with red highlighter, as I do on each jump. After spending time in the '56-'57 watching the region's Sahara-dune-like sand fills flash by in the light cast by the coach-cars' security spot lights, I visit the Pie Car for a late, hot meal. Afterwards, I move outside again, to the '42-'41 vestibule, where Jon Bell sits dozing on a stool, his head resting on his arm, which is draped over the lower Dutch door. Sensing my presence, he looks over and nods a sleepy "hello."

As we approach our destination, its skylight grows ever brighter, and at 10:30 p.m. this June 1987 evening, we enter the city limits of El Paso, Texas, slowing down.

Arrival

By 11 p.m., we're being spotted across the main track from Southern Pacific's diesel servicing facility, where units in several railroad company paint schemes stand on ready tracks, including green, ex-Burlington Northern units wearing NHL initials for National Helm Leasing. One cut of four engines is a Paducah & Louisville Railroad unit, two white-painted SOO Line units and others belonging to Southern Pacific, all coupled together in a color-patch miss-match. Also around are "Cotton Belt" units and a red-and-yellow SP-SF aborted-merger-painted engine.

Our coaches are split into five cuts, with one of those placed half a block away, unable to fit with the others. An electrical lead is quickly put in service from RBX 43's generator. Porters put out train-steps at each fully-opened vestibule and tie plastic trashcan liners on the handrails by doorway. And 350 people have just moved to El Paso.

I hope you have enjoyed this trip as much as I've enjoyed having you aboard! And now, while you depart, I have to work. Ramp call begins as soon as the flatcars are into the proper unloading order; they're ready by 2:00 a.m. We finish setting the ramps, or "runs" as they are known by Circus veterans by 4:00 a.m. and walk back to the coaches a mile away for a short power nap. Rising at 7:00 a.m., we catch the 8:00 a.m. bus to the arena to spend eight hours setting up the show; the opening performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and lasts for two and a half hours.... WOW, WHAT A WORK-DAY!

Downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is seen from the coaches as we round the curve, westbound from the Amtrak Station, June 15, 1987 on Conrail's tracks above the city streets. Bill Atkins photo, Author's collection.



To seasoned employees, this has been just another jump, one of many each year that are simply part of the job. To railfans, this experience is unique, since we travel over much freight train-only territory, on rail lines that haven't seen passenger trains for decades, if ever. To Circus owner Kenneth Feld, this trip has cost a lot of money, for railroad hauling charges, hay and feed for the animals, water and generator fuel, food for the Pie Car, etc. Yet, this is the most inexpensive, cost-effective and reliable method of mobility for The Greatest Show On Earth, just as it's been since William Coup convinced Phineas Taylor Barnum to take to the rails for the show's Second Edition, way back in 1872.



The 117th Edition Spec, King Tusk. Author's collection.

For new RBBB clown Alex Blatt, who joined out with us only last week, this has been his first ride on a train, any train! His feelings: "It gave me time to think about my life, what it would be like on the show and what I expected to

accomplish here," he says, adding, "In the Circus, you can be very up or very down, and the middle ground in between is ever so precious. That's what the train-run has been for me: the perfect neutral ground, very relaxing." That is a common feeling shared by many on both the Red and Blue Units of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

The future of the great American Railroad Circus is uncertain, owing to problems such as railcar supply (as the current fleet ages), lack of space to store the growing length of the two RBBB trains as railroads continue to remove unused track, and alternate forms of entertainment which draw away audience share. But perhaps time and circumstances will unfold in a way that

will allow the show to survive, and grow ever wider, on the rails. We must have faith.

On the Moonlight Lady, I have traveled through sweating Texas heat and Carolina winter chill; through multi-colored Colorado fall and budding Kentucky spring. Aboard her, I've ridden through fire-charred California forest or greenery-rich California woodland (as well as by the Golden State's golden-like grass—that's how that slogan's phrase was derived) ... down that state's Tehachapi Loop ... around Pennsylvania's Horseshoe Curve ... under the Gateway Arch ... over the Huey P. Long Bridge in New Orleans ... over the Lucin Cutoff (fill) over Great Salt Lake ... through tunnels as far and wide as Colorado's Moffat and

Massachusetts' Hoosac, or through the tunnel under West Point Military Academy in New York ... through big city 'burgs and small town whistle stops ... along both coasts, in both major mountain ranges and across the Bible Belt. I've been in her heart, pain as well as joy, experiencing an exciting life in places seen only by freight railroaders or railfan cameras. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus has brought into my life the ultimate foray into a personal introspection of my very soul, a unique introduction to real "street-smarts," an appreciation for "discipline, motion and speed" in whatever one attempts to accomplish no matter how small or large, and a deeply spiritual realization and fervent hope for our shared humanity in overcoming

adversity at every turn—by always coming up smiling in the end—thanks to the amazing men, women and children who, as Cecil B. DeMille once put it, "...fight to make it The Greatest Show On Earth."

These people are my Circus Family!

Through this powerful, life-changing Circus Train



Cast and crew explore the hot desert west of Kent, Texas. Author's collection.

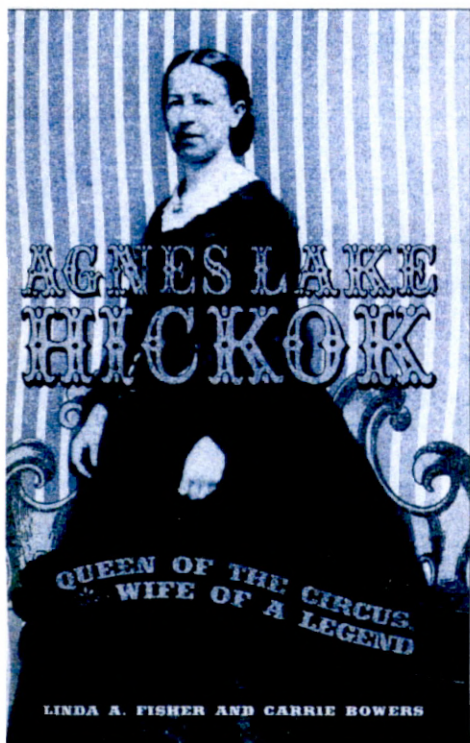
Adventure, I have come to understand the hypnotic effect upon the soul generated by the rhythm of the rails: guiding, supporting, always moving ahead toward a new destination, yet allowing enough time to enjoy and reflect upon the ride along the way. Few things are left that allow that kind of time anymore; trains still do. Perhaps it is the over-

whelming feeling of going somewhere that leads railfans to trackside, and brings "Children of All Ages," like myself, to see (or in my case, join out with) the Circus.

It is the going, and not the getting there, that's good!

This trip has become history; it is finished, completed. I myself wouldn't mind another day of going, but as it is with life, such journeys end in a destiny. What is the Circus's destiny? To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The show's the thing." Our purpose out here on the rails, where the green lights of integrity command us to continue on, mile after silver mile, is to spread a little love and then move on again. This is what makes riding the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Train unique among all other train rides: it's not just a train ride; it's a journey in our own home. Nowhere else can one experience life like this from our own porch as well as share the adventure with all his neighbors, all of his Circus Family. This is the thrilling story of life aboard the Circus Train, The Greatest Show On Earth's Moonlight Lady... the last place where the romance of the railroad still brings us the wonder of the Circus.

ley Circus Train unique among all other train rides: it's not just a train ride; it's a journey in our own home. Nowhere else can one experience life like this from our own porch as well as share the adventure with all his neighbors, all of his Circus Family. This is the thrilling story of life aboard the Circus Train, The Greatest Show On Earth's Moonlight Lady... the last place where the romance of the railroad still brings us the wonder of the Circus.



Agnes Lake Hickok

Queen of the Circus, Wife of a Legend

By Linda A. Fisher and Carrie Bowers

The first woman in America to own and operate a circus, Agnes Lake spent thirty years under the Big Top before becoming the wife of Wild Bill Hickok—a mere five months before he was killed. While books abound on the famous lawman, Agnes's life has remained obscured by circus myth and legend.

Linda A. Fisher and Carrie Bowers have written the first biography of this colorful but little-known circus performer. Agnes originally found fame as a slack-wire walker and horseback rider, and later as an animal trainer. Her circus career spanned more than four decades. Following the murder of her first husband, Bill Lake, she was the sole manager of the "Hippo-Olympiad and Mammoth Circus." While taking her show to Abilene, she met town marshal Hickok and married him five years later. After Hickok's death, Agnes traveled with P. T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill Cody, and managed her daughter Emma Lake's successful equestrian career.

This account of a remarkable life cuts through fictions about Agnes's life, including her own embellishments, to uncover her true story. Numerous illustrations, including rare photographs and circus memorabilia, bring Agnes's world to life.

\$29.95 HARDCOVER · 40 B&W ILLUS., 2 MAPS, 416 PAGES



UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

2800 VENTURE DRIVE · NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069 · TEL 800 627 7377 · OUPRESS.COM

THE HECK PHOTOS

In 1911 Steve Albasing started in the outdoor show business with the 101 Ranch Wild West, joining in Minneapolis, leaving at Fort Worth in late September. About a week later he hooked up with Ringling Brothers World's Greatest Shows when it appeared at Fort Worth on 2 October. He worked side show canvas and slept in the snake den with two of his cohorts and three snakes. Later in the month the reptiles died from the cold, which must have seemed like divine intervention to the canvasmen.

He went by the alias John Heck, a not uncommon practice for roustabouts in 1911. He was better known, however, as "101" or "101 Heck," the moniker coming from his first show business employer. He spent the winter of 1911-1912 at the Ringling winter quarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin painting and gilding wagons.

By the time the circus opened its 1912 tour, Heck had been promoted to the men's wardrobe department. Ringling carried two sets of parade and spec wardrobe, he recalled, the newer outfits for good weather days, the previous year's garments for rainy ones. Heck remembered that the decision to change attire often occurred moments before parade, setting off a panic in the wardrobe department as personnel scrambled to replace the new costumes with the old ones. The show carried two tailors, called sailors, to keep the costumes and uniforms in good condition. They also made repairs to the big top and other canvas.

Like many other lower-paid employees on circuses, he augmented his income by washing costumes and civilian clothes for affluent performers. He even became a tattoo artist, once inking up a buddy in the baggage horse department who aspired to be the illustrated man in the sideshow.

Heck was also a photographer. He used a Graflex camera, a first rate piece of equipment used by professional photographers. He developed his negatives inside a tableau wagon that doubled as his darkroom. He had a real eye for capturing the rhythms of circus

life, occasionally rising to the level of the Fred Glasier, the finest photographer the circus ever had.

While he later suggested that he was the official photographer on the Ringling Circus in the 1910s, his pictures never appeared in its advertising. His handiwork, however, did show up in many performers' photo albums, indicating he sold pictures around the show.

Albasing left the circus business after the 1919 season; he appears to have stopped taking pictures after the 1917 season. He became a railroad man out of Milwaukee. In the late 1940s he met Chappie Fox, then living near Milwaukee, who sold sixty of Albasing's prints, making them available to the circus fan community for the first time.

About 1958 Albasing himself sold his pictures. A circular advertising them suggests he had the makings of a bill writer. "These are all exceptionally excellent photos—clear and sharp, taken with a large Graflex camera," he modestly noted. "Remember, these photographs are not a motley lot of amateur snapshots from a box camera, but a superb collection of photos. . . ."

In 1968 the Circus World Museum bought approximately 300 negatives and prints from Albasing for \$150, certainly money well spent. It probably also acquired a photo album of his in which he identified many of the subjects in his pictures.

His photos have been underappreciated. While he rarely reached the level of the great triumvirate of truly gifted circus photographers—Harry Atwell, Ed Kely, and Glasier—he nevertheless had a better eye than more well known lensmen in the circus business such as Eddie Jackson. Steve Albasing, wardrobe man and photographer, died in 1970. He was 79 years old and lived in Milwaukee. Many thanks to Erin Foley of the Circus World Museum Library for her help on this piece. All illustrations are from the Circus World Museum collection. Fred D. Pfening III

The great picture of the entire show on the lot at Red Wing, Minnesota, 31 August 1915.





Cook house decked out for 4th of July at Erie, Pennsylvania, 1917.



Cook house range, 1914.



Air calliope with ten pony hitch, 1914.



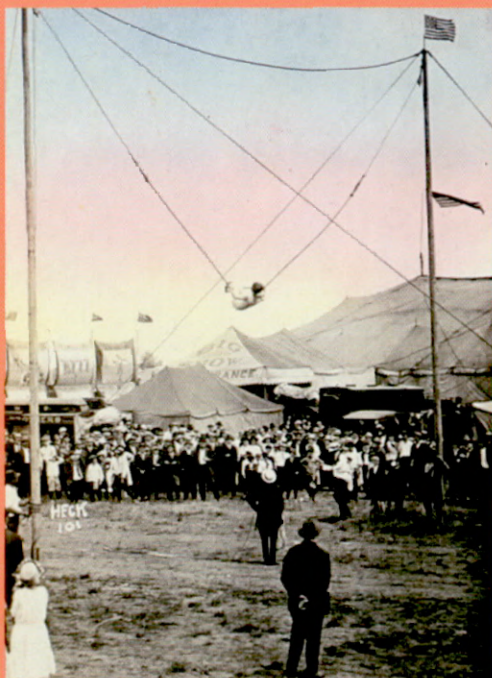
Circus personnel patiently wait in line for mail. Sign above back opening of wagons say "Post Office Ringlingville," no date.



Edna Curtis with monkeys and dogs. Waco, Texas, 8 October 1915. Great Britain bandwagon is covered with tarp on right.



Side show band, 1915, Rob Roy Pope director.



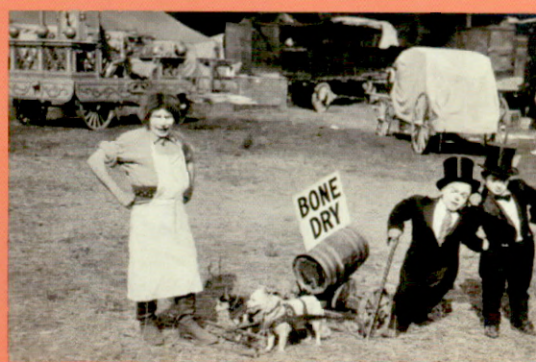
Jenny Rooney doing a free act on the midway, 1912.



Charles Ringling, left, with Otokar Bartik, spec choreographer.



J. J. Richards and the big show band in front of the United States bandwagon, cr. 1916.



Members of the Kassino Midget troupe in the back yard.



Parade in Birmingham, Alabama, 23 October 1916.



Train unloading at Texakana, Arkansas, 2 November 1917, three days before the season's end.



Baggage horses at feed and water stop in Dunsmire, California en route to Fresno, probably 6 September 1917.



The show's baseball team, the Bingos with mascot behind them, 1915.



Clown group, 1915.



Six pole big top, shortly before being raised, 1915.



Sleepers and advance car at winter quarters train shed in Baraboo, 1917.



Ching Ling Troupe of hair hangers and sword swallows, no date.



Black canvasmen waiting for barber. Caption reads: "Shooting a little African golf while waiting for a shave," a reflection of the era's racism.



Big top interior, Boston, June 1917.



Crew carrying center pole for set up. Note unassembled ring curb on left.



Members of the Wisconsin 32nd Division pose on elephant and water wagon. John Agee on left.

Key To Candy Butcher's Success? Location. Location, Location

By Lane Talburt

Copyright 2009

Even when Pat Long was among the top salespeople among her Ringling Bros. cohorts, she dared not brag about it until after the count had been completed at the end of a local engagement.

"When I was working the souvenir stand, they had a rule," the retired concessionaire explained. "The way you got to choose your spot at the next town is if you grossed the most sales.

"And some people were a little dishonest. They liked to throw [their own] money in so they'd get better picks. So you didn't want to tell anybody what you grossed, because then they could out-gross you.

"But they wouldn't let me count the money, because, somehow or another, when I started hitting about a thousand dollars, I would start giggling—badly. Then everybody would know how well I was doing."

Pat's favorite spots were near an arena entrance or a restroom. A poor location resulted in poor sales, she moaned.

Reflecting on her career with Feld Entertainment's Sells Floto subsidiary from 1977 through 1992, Pat Long could laugh heartily about her in-the-trenches experiences. It may not have been quite so funny at the time, when candy butchers were trying to outdo one another in the arena stands or in the hallways.

Pat revealed some of the highlights of her years on the Red and Blue units while attending her first Circus Historical Society convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, in October 2007. She made the trip in a custom-crafted van from her home in Bakersfield, California. A primary purpose of the journey was to visit with one of her former bosses, Archie Chan Jr., who was billed as a principal speaker.

Since going off the road in 1992—her knees had simply given out from the rigors of selling through thousands of show—Pat has continued to work in a series of non-traditional jobs. Her latest is process server, a task where, she admits, people do not greet her as enthusiastically as they did when she was offering snow cones and flashing lights.

Then again, Ms. Long has no pretense of being a normal homebody.

After graduating from Bakersfield high school, she served three years as a medic and an X-ray technician in the Army and later tried her luck as a cab driver for three more years in Baltimore. No matter how many hours she worked, or how many tips she picked up, she almost never was able to save any money. The reason? Pat got bit by the circus bug—

and hard.

Although her father had taken her to a few circuses as she grew up in California, she had never seen Ringling Bros. until she accompanied her sister to the opening performance of the Ringling Red unit in Baltimore in 1975.

"I fell in love with the show. It was the Bicentennial edition, with Gunther Gebel Williams, and it was the best show they ever had, I think," she recalls. "I saw every show there in Baltimore."

She started following the circus, hitch-hiking and sometimes driving her cab to different cities.

"I saw the Red unit 156 times in two years," Pat said.

"I wasn't making any money as a cabdriver, because I kept taking off to see the show. I was living on cotton candy and popcorn because I didn't have money for food," Pat muses. "I was staying in flop-house hotels because I didn't have any place to sleep."

Pat Long. Author's photo.



The spell-bound "groupie" became well known backstage to performers such as clown Lou Jacobs and lion tamer Wolfgang Holtzmeier, as well as to the vendors.

Knowing her skills as a cabbie, circus executives in 1976 (the second year of the Red unit's bicentennial tour) dispatched Pat to pick up Dolly Jacobs at National Airport during the show's Washington, D.C. engagement so that Miss Jacobs could audition her Roman rings act for owner Irvin Feld. She also remembers chauffeuring Lou Jacobs and daughter Dolly from the DC armory circus site to a "big to-do"

at Feld's home.

Although she was acquainted with the owner—and once had to vouch for him to a private security guard who refused to admit Feld to the Venice winter quarters arena because he didn't have his ID, Pat cautioned that "you tried to stay away from the big bosses as much as possible. That way you stay out of trouble."

One boss who was not moved by her pleas to join the show was Red unit concession manager Roland Kaiser (later to become one of the owners of Circus Vargas following Cliff Vargas' death). When Pat arrived unannounced at the Ringling quarters in Venice in early 1977—having thumbed her way from Baltimore—Kaiser minced no words. "Over my dead body" was the way he reportedly put it to the would-be first-of-May.

Undeterred, Pat wormed her way into a job on Marty



A Ringling-Barnum number one concession stand. Paul Gutheil photo.

Kora's snowball joint. She initially had to hitchhike between show sites and roomed in flophouses. "After a month or two of this, Roland finally gave up and got me a place on the train. Later, we became friends."

Not that her roomette on the Red train was anything to write home about.

Her tiny cubicle on one of the three concessions sleepers on the Ringling consist (the manager had a half of another car to himself) was just large enough to accommodate a bed and pull-down wash basin.

The few clothes she brought along hung on a railing, scraping across her stomach as she slept. A neighbor's bunk jutted over a part of her compartment. "It basically was like sleeping in a coffin; but I liked it." Her on-the-road domicile was two doors down from the communal doniker at the end of the sleeper, a mixed blessing for certain. Some vendors and their families chose to drive overland.

Understand, however, that Ms. Long wasn't grouching about her quarters. The rent was cheap—about \$10 or \$11 a week. Plus she considered meals in the dining car to be reasonably priced. Or, she could pick up a hamburger and fries at the junior pie-car parked on each performance site.

During her career as an "independent contractor" for Sells Floto, Pat's working schedule differed according to the number of days and performances at any given stand. Like her compatriots in or out of the ring, she dreaded the "six-pack" weekends—three performances on Saturdays and Sundays. On rare occasions, Ringling put its employees through a nine-pack grind, with three-a-day shows on Friday through Sunday, or Saturday through Monday.

At each city the butchers helped set up the concession stands in preparation for the opening performance. On most days, Pat and her cohorts would rise by 7:30 a.m. to catch the 8:00 gilly bus to the arena, which sometimes was situated close by the train and at other times was many miles away. They were required to have their wares ready for the 10:00 a.m. call to "doors," an hour before the first performance.

Following the evening show, the tired crew reboarded the bus for the trip back to the train. A few wandered off to a nearby watering hole, although Pat was not among them. After a late meal in the dining car, Pat

settled into her confined sleeping space, often not until 1:30 a.m.

The combination of sleep-deprivation and colorful personalities—and the energy expended in attempts to outsell one another—led to a myriad of conflicts among the vendors.



A smaller concession stand. Paul Gutheil photo.

When Pat first joined the Ringling Red unit in 1977, she said she had numerous arguments with Marty Kora. (His twin brother, Frank Kora, also was a vendor.) Marty had the Number 1 snow cone stand, she explained, and Pat was

paid \$5 a show to dip snowballs.

"Marty was a character. We used to fight, and my language was pretty bad back then. We'd be cussing up a storm when [circus goers] walked by, and they'd probably think, 'Never mind, it's just husband and wife.' We weren't married, but Marty and I fought like cats and dogs. It's a wonder I didn't get fired for my language."

Smiling as she recalled her encounters with her boss, Pat said Kora threw a snow dipping spoon at her during one brouhaha. Kora unexpectedly left the show in Philadelphia in early 1977. Pat and another vendor took over the stand and started getting a cut of the action—until Kora returned to the show in Chicago. Her compensation immediately reverted from a percentage to a flat, \$5-per-show rate.

Upset with this arrangement, Pat accepted an offer from Bobby Johnson to switch to the Blue unit in the spring of 1978. With the change to a new environment, her language improved markedly, Pat said. She described Johnson, her new Sells Floto manager, as "a real character. He was hysterical. We liked him."



A Sells-Floto storage car on Ringling-Barnum.

The Blue unit remained her circus home until she retired, her service interrupted only by brief stints on the Feld-owned Disney on Ice shows during the circus's winter hiatus. While working with Disney on Ice, Ms. Long and other vendors could not go into the stands during the performance. They were permitted to sell only during the come-in, intermission and blowoff.

She particularly preferred to work concessions when the ice units played Long Island, which could be highly lucrative for vendors, even with reduced sales opportunities.

Sells-Floto vendors also had the option to hire on temporarily to building-owned concessions at Madison Square Garden when Ringling played New York City. Pat often took that time off to visit her parents in Bakersfield, returning to the next show arena in Philadelphia via her tried-and-true, ride-hitching techniques.

Her propensity to relying on her thumb for ground transportation led to more than a few interesting experiences.

One year, during a circus-train water stop between Atlanta and Raleigh, North Carolina, a distraught concessions clerk babbled to Ms. Long that she had lost Lola (concession manager Henry Baragon's cockapoo dog), before the train pulled out of Atlanta. Pat immediately volunteered to hitchhike some 120 miles back to Atlanta, where she luckily located the missing pouch. With Lola under her arm, she thumbbed her way to Raleigh. Boss butcher Baragon easily forgave Pat for blowing the first show at the new site.

"Henry was so glad to have his dogs back [that] we were friends for life."

On another occasion, Pat left the show briefly on completion of the Washington, D.C., engagement to have minor surgery. She checked herself into a nearby Veterans Administration hospital (her Army service having earned her free medical benefits). She took along two large bags of left-over popcorn to share with the vets. On her release, Pat hitched a series of rides to rejoin the Blue unit in Binghamton, New York.

Pat frequently took advantage of water stops in transit to ditch the train and, carrying her laundry, to bum a ride to the next show town. There, after washing her clothes, she treated herself to a movie and a prime-rib dinner before taking a cab to the rail yards to await the arrival of the circus train, usually after midnight.

Ms. Long attributed a worsening arthritic condition in her knees to the many hours of stair-climbing in arenas. She was able to turn her snail-like walkabouts in the stands into a competitive advantage, however, as she explained:

"You see, the other guys were running up and down the stairs like crazy. But I'd be going slowly, and the people that were just thinking about buying would wave at me, and I'd get them," she laughed.

As her arthritis began to limit her mobility, she asked for and was given a souvenir stand, where she

was able to take breaks while the performers worked their magic before the crowds.

In her last three years on the show, she worked the "food table, which is snowballs, cotton candy, programs, coloring books, what-have-you."

In 1991, she was forced to take leave briefly for treatment of a blood clot. On checking herself out of the VA hospital in Buffalo (against the advice of medical staff), she took a bus to work the ice show in Nassau, Long Island. She retired from her Sells Floto duties after the next season.

Looking back at her Feld career, Pat Long said she made many friends on various units.

But she said she didn't date and didn't become romantically involved with anyone. "I never married, never had children. I was just too busy. People were coming and going so quickly on the show that I didn't want to get attached to anybody. I knew I was staying, but I wasn't sure about them."

Despite the unusual hours and the strenuous activities, Pat insists that "I loved every moment, every day. I'd still be there if I could. I'm physically not able, and I know that. But it sure was fun."

When she shows up at Ringling performances—the Blue unit plays Fresno and the Red stops in Bakersfield on alternating years—Pat still recognizes a few of the regulars from the days when she was traipsing the aisles. Many of the vendors, though, are the sons and daughters of her former co-workers. She also is a frequent visitor in other circus backyards.

Buffalo Bill: Round: 22-28 marzo 1906.

